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DRET. HARTE'S
- TALES -
VOL. 2.

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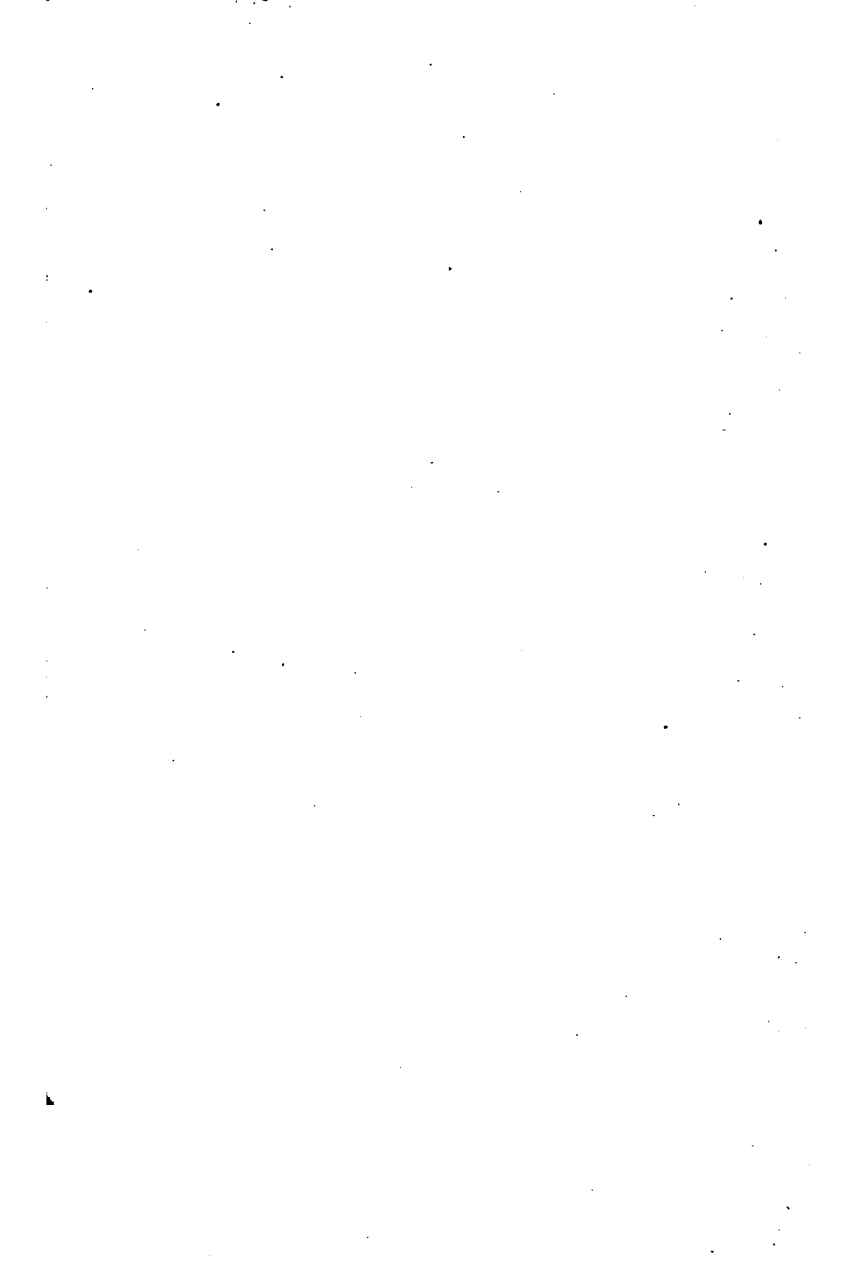
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THE
HERITAGE OF DEDLOW MARSH
AND OTHER TALES



THE HERITAGE
OF DEDLOW MARSH
AND OTHER TALES

BY

BRET HARTE

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. II

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III

A SECRET OF TELEGRAPH
HILL

VOL. II

B



A SECRET OF TELEGRAPH HILL

I

As Mr. Herbert Bly glanced for the first time at the house which was to be his future abode in San Francisco, he was somewhat startled. In that early period of feverish civic improvement the street before it had been repeatedly graded and lowered until the dwelling—originally a pioneer suburban villa perched upon a slope of Telegraph Hill—now stood sixty feet above the side-walk, superposed like some Swiss chalet on successive galleries built in the sand-hill,

and connected by a half-dozen distinct zigzag flights of wooden staircase. Stimulated, however, by the thought that the view from the top would be a fine one, and that existence there would have all the quaint originality of Robinson Crusoe's tree-dwelling, Mr. Bly began cheerfully to mount the steps. It should be premised that, although a recently appointed clerk in a large banking house, Mr. Bly was somewhat youthful and imaginative, and regarded the ascent as part of that 'Excelsior' climbing pointed out by a great poet as a praiseworthy function of ambitious youth.

Reaching at last the level of the verandah, he turned to the view. The distant wooded shore of Contra Costa, the tossing white caps and dancing sails of the bay between, and the fore-

ground at his feet of wharves and piers, with their reed-like jungles of masts and cordage, made up a bright, if somewhat material, picture. To his right rose the crest of the hill, historic and memorable as the site of the old semaphoric telegraph, the tossing of whose gaunt arms formerly thrilled the citizens with tidings from the sea. Turning to the house, he recognised the prevailing style of light cottage architecture, although incongruously confined to narrow building plots and the civic regularity of a precise street frontage. Thus a dozen other villas, formerly scattered over the slope, had been laboriously displaced and moved to the rigorous parade line drawn by the street surveyor, no matter how irregular and independent their design and structure. Happily, the few 'scrub

oaks' and low bushes which formed the scant vegetation of this vast sand dune offered no obstacle and suggested no incongruity. Beside the house before which Mr. Bly now stood, a prolific Madeira vine, quickened by the six months' sunshine, had alone survived the displacement of its foundations, and in its untrimmed luxuriance half hid the upper verandah from his view.

Still glowing with his exertion, the young man rang the bell and was admitted into a fair-sized drawing-room, whose tasteful and well-arranged furniture at once prepossessed him. An open piano, a sheet of music carelessly left on the stool, a novel lying face downwards on the table beside a skein of silk, and the distant rustle of a vanished skirt through

an inner door, gave a suggestion of refined domesticity to the room that touched the fancy of the homeless and nomadic Bly. He was still enjoying, in half embarrassment, that vague and indescribable atmosphere of a refined woman's habitual presence, when the door opened and the mistress of the house formally presented herself.

She was a faded but still handsome woman. Yet she wore that peculiar long, limp, formless house-shawl which in certain phases of Anglo-Saxon spinster and widowhood assumes the functions of the recluse's veil and announces the renunciation of worldly vanities and a resigned indifference to external feminine contour. The most audacious masculine arm would shrink from clasping that shapeless void in which

the flatness of asceticism or the heavings of passion might alike lie buried. She had also in some mysterious way imported into the fresh and pleasant room a certain bombaziny shadow of the past, and a suggestion of that appalling reminiscence known as 'better days.' Though why it should be always represented by ashen memories, or why better days in the past should be supposed to fix their fitting symbol in depression in the present, Mr. Bly was too young and too preoccupied at the moment to determine. He only knew that he was a little frightened of her, and fixed his gaze with a hopeless fascination on a letter which she somewhat portentously carried under the shawl, and which seemed already to have yellowed in its Arctic shade.

'Mr. Carstone has written to me that you would call,' said Mrs. Brooks with languid formality. 'Mr. Carstone was a valued friend of my late husband, and I suppose has told you the circumstances — the only circumstances — which admit of my entertaining his proposition of taking anybody, even temporarily, under my roof. The absence of my dear son for six months at Portland, Oregon, enables me to place his room at the disposal of Mr. Carstone's young protégé, who, Mr. Carstone tells me, and I have every reason to believe, is, if perhaps not so seriously inclined nor yet a Church communicant, still of a character and reputation not unworthy to follow my dear Tappington in our little family circle as he has at his desk in the bank.'

The sensitive Bly, struggling painfully out of an abstraction as to how he was ever to offer the weekly rent of his lodgings to such a remote and respectable person, and also somewhat embarrassed at being appealed to in the third person, here started and bowed.

‘The name of Bly is not unfamiliar to me,’ continued Mrs. Brooks, pointing to a chair and sinking resignedly into another, where her baleful shawl at once assumed the appearance of a dust-cover; ‘some of my dearest friends were intimate with the Blys of Philadelphia. They were a branch of the Maryland Blys of the eastern shore, one of whom my Uncle James married. Perhaps you are distantly related?’

Mrs. Brooks was perfectly aware that her visitor was of unknown western origin, and a poor

but clever protégé of the rich banker; but she was one of a certain class of American women who, in the midst of a fierce democracy, are more or less cat-like conservators of family pride and lineage, and more or less feline inconsistent and treacherous to Republican principles. Bly, who had just settled in his mind to send her the rent anonymously—as a weekly valentine—recovered himself and his spirits in his usual boyish fashion.

‘I am afraid, Mrs. Brooks,’ he said gaily, ‘I cannot lay claim to any distinguished relationship, even to that “Nelly Bly” who, you remember, “winked her eye when she went to sleep.”’ He stopped in consternation. The terrible conviction flashed upon him that this quotation from a popular negro-minstrel song

could not possibly be 'remembered' by a lady as refined as his hostess, or even known to her superior son. The conviction was intensified by Mrs. Brooks rising with a smileless face, slightly shedding the possible vulgarity with a shake of her shawl, and remarking that she would show him her son's room, led the way upstairs to the apartment recently vacated by the perfect Tappington.

Preceded by the same distant flutter of unseen skirts in the passage which he had first noticed on entering the drawing-room, and which evidently did not proceed from his companion, whose self-composed cerements would have repressed any such indecorous agitation, Mr. Bly stepped timidly into the room. It was a very pretty apartment, suggesting the same

touches of tasteful refinement in its furniture and appointments, and withal so feminine in its neatness and regularity, that, conscious of his frontier habits and experience, he felt at once repulsively incongruous. 'I cannot expect, Mr. Bly,' said Mrs. Brooks resignedly, 'that you can share my son's extreme sensitiveness to disorder and irregularity; but I must beg you to avoid as much as possible disturbing the arrangement of the book-shelves, which, you observe, comprise his books of serious reference, the Biblical commentaries, and the sermons that were his habitual study. I must beg you to exercise the same care in reference to the valuable offerings from his Sabbath-school scholars, which are upon the mantel. The embroidered book-marker, the gift of the young

ladies of his Bible-class in Dr. Stout's church, is also, you perceive, kept for ornament and affectionate remembrance. The harmonium—even if you are not yourself given to sacred song—I trust you will not find in your way, nor object to my daughter continuing her practice during your daily absence. Thank you. The door you are looking at leads by a flight of steps to the side street.'

'A very convenient arrangement,' said Bly hopefully, who saw a chance for an occasional unostentatious escape from a too-protracted contemplation of Tappington's perfections. 'I mean,' he added hurriedly, 'to avoid disturbing you at night.'

'I believe my son had neither the necessity nor desire to use it for that purpose,' returned

Mrs. Brooks severely; 'although he found it sometimes a convenient short cut to church on Sabbath when he was late.'

Bly, who in his boyish sensitiveness to external impressions had by this time concluded that a life divided between the past perfections of Tappington and the present renunciations of Mrs. Brooks would be intolerable, and was again abstractedly inventing some delicate excuse for withdrawing without committing himself further, was here suddenly attracted by a repetition of the rustling of the unseen skirt. This time it was nearer, and this time it seemed to strike even Mrs. Brooks's remote preoccupation. 'My daughter, who is deeply devoted to her brother,' she said, slightly raising her voice, 'will take upon herself the

care of looking after Tappington's precious mementoes, and spare you the trouble. Cherry, dear! this way. This is the young gentleman spoken of by Mr. Carstone, your papa's friend. My daughter Cherubina, Mr. Bly.'

The fair owner of the rustling skirt, which turned out to be a pretty French print, had appeared at the doorway. She was a tall slim blonde, with a shy startled manner, as of a penitent nun who was suffering for some conventual transgression — a resemblance that was heightened by her short-cut hair, that might have been cropped as if for punishment. A certain likeness to her mother suggested that she was qualifying for that saint's ascetic shawl—subject, however, to rebellious intervals, indicated in the occasional sidelong fires of her gray eyes.

Yet the vague impression that she knew more of the world than her mother, and that she did not look at all as if her name was Cherubina, struck Bly in the same momentary glance.

‘Mr. Bly is naturally pleased with what he has seen of our dear Tappington’s appointments; and as I gather from Mr. Carstone’s letter that he is anxious to enter at once and make the most of the dear boy’s absence, you will see, my dear Cherry, that Ellen has everything ready for him?’

Before the unfortunate Bly could explain or protest, the young girl lifted her gray eyes to his. Whether she had perceived and understood his perplexity he could not tell; but the swift shy glance was at once appealing, assuring, and intelligent. She was certainly unlike her

mother and brother! Acting with his usual impulsiveness, he forgot his previous resolution, and before he left had engaged to begin his occupation of the room on the following day.

The next afternoon found him installed. Yet, after he had unpacked his modest possessions and put them away, after he had placed his few books on the shelves, where they looked glaringly trivial and frivolous beside the late tenant's severe studies; after he had set out his scanty treasures in the way of photographs and some curious mementoes of his wandering life, and then quickly put them back again with a sudden angry pride at exposing them to the unsympathetic incongruity of the other ornaments, he, nevertheless, felt ill at ease. He glanced in vain around the pretty room. It was not the

delicately flowered wall-paper ; it was not the white and blue muslin window-curtains gracefully tied up with blue and white ribbons ; it was not the spotless bed, with its blue and white festooned mosquito-net and flounced valences, and its medallion portrait of an unknown bishop at the back ; it was not the few tastefully framed engravings of certain cardinal virtues, ' The Rock of Ages,' and ' The Guardian Angel ' ; it was not the casts in relief of ' Night ' and ' Morning ' ; it was certainly not the cosy dimity-covered arm-chairs and sofa, nor yet the clean-swept polished grate with its cheerful fire sparkling against the chill afternoon sea-fogs without. Neither was it the mere feminine suggestion, for that touched a sympathetic cord in his impulsive nature ; nor the religious and ascetic influence, for he had

occupied a monastic cell in a school of the padres at an old mission, and slept profoundly;—it was none of those, and yet a part of all. Most habitations retain a cast or shell of their previous tenant that, fitting tightly or loosely, is still able to adjust itself to the newcomer; in most occupied apartments there is still a shadowy suggestion of the owner's individuality; there was nothing here that fitted Bly—nor was there either, strange to say, any evidence of the past proprietor in this inhospitality of sensation. It did not strike him at the time that it was this very *lack* of individuality which made it weird and unreal, that it was strange only because it was *artificial*, and that a *real* Tappington had never inhabited it.

He walked to the window—that never-failing

resource of the unquiet mind—and looked out. He was a little surprised to find that, owing to the grading of the house, the scrub oaks and bushes of the hill were nearly on the level of his window, as also was the adjoining side street on which his second door actually gave. Opening this, the sudden invasion of the sea-fog and the figure of a pedestrian casually passing along the disused and abandoned pavement not a dozen feet from where he had been comfortably seated, presented such a striking contrast to the studious quiet and cosiness of his secluded apartment that he hurriedly closed the door again with a sense of indiscreet exposure. Returning to the window, he glanced to the left, and found that he was overlooked by the side verandah of another villa in the rear, evidently on its way to take position

on the line of the street. Although in actual and deliberate transit on rollers across the backyard and still occulting a part of the view, it remained, after the reckless fashion of the period, inhabited. Certainly, with a door fronting a thoroughfare, and a neighbour gradually approaching him, he would not feel lonely or lack excitement.

He drew his arm-chair to the fire and tried to realise the all-pervading yet evasive Tappington. There was no portrait of him in the house, and although Mrs. Brooks had said that he 'favoured' his sister, Bly had, without knowing why, instinctively resented it. He had even timidly asked his employer, and had received the vague reply that he was 'good-looking enough,' and the practical but discomposing retort, 'What do you

want to know for?' As he really did not know why, the inquiry had dropped. He stared at the monumental crystal inkstand half full of ink, yet spotless and free from stains, that stood on the table, and tried to picture Tappington daintily dipping into it to thank the fair donors — 'daughters of Rebecca.' Who were they? and what sort of man would they naturally feel grateful to?

What was that?

He turned to the window, which had just resounded to a slight tap or blow, as if something soft had struck it. With an instinctive suspicion of the propinquity of the adjoining street, he rose, but a single glance from the window satisfied him that no missile would have reached it from thence. He scanned the

low bushes on the level before him; certainly no one could be hiding there. He lifted his eyes towards the house on the left; the curtains of the nearest window appeared to be drawn suddenly at the same moment. Could it have come from there? Looking down upon the window-ledge, there lay the mysterious missile—a little misshapen ball. He opened the window and took it up. It was a small handkerchief tied into a soft knot, and dampened with water to give it the necessary weight as a projectile.

Was it apparently the trick of a mischievous child? or——

But here a faint knock on the door leading into the hall checked his inquiry. He opened it sharply in his excitement, and was em-

barrasted to find the daughter of his hostess standing there, shy, startled, and evidently equally embarrassed by his abrupt response.

‘Mother only wanted me to ask you if Ellen had put everything to rights,’ she said, making a step backwards.

‘Oh, thank you. Perfectly,’ said Herbert with effusion. ‘Nothing could be better done. In fact——’

‘You’re quite sure she hasn’t forgotten anything? or that there isn’t anything you would like changed?’ she continued, with her eyes levelled on the floor.

‘Nothing, I assure you,’ he said, looking at her downcast lashes. As she still remained motionless, he continued cheerfully, ‘Would you—would you—care to look round and see?’

‘No; I thank you.’

There was an awkward pause. He still continued to hold the door open. Suddenly, she moved forward with a school-girl stride, entered the room, and going to the harmonium, sat down upon the music-stool beside it, slightly bending forward, with one long, slim, white hand on top of the other, resting over her crossed knees.

Herbert was a little puzzled. It was the awkward and brusque act of a very young person, and yet nothing now could be more gentle and self-composed than her figure and attitude.

‘Yes,’ he continued smilingly; ‘I am only afraid that I may not be able to live quite up to the neatness and regularity of the example I find here everywhere. You know I am dread-

fully careless and not at all orderly. I shudder to think what may happen; but you and your mother, Miss Brooks, I trust, will make up your minds to overlook and forgive a good deal. I shall do my best to be worthy of Mr. Tap—of my predecessor—but even then I am afraid you'll find me a great bother.'

She raised her shy eyelids. The faintest ghost of a long buried dimple came into her pale cheek as she said softly, to his utter consternation—

'Rats!'

Had she uttered an oath he could not have been more startled than he was by this choice gem of western saloon-slang from the pure lips of this Evangeline-like figure before him. He sat gazing at her with a wild hysteric desire to laugh. She lifted her eyes again, swept

him with a slightly terrified glance, and said—

‘Tap says you all say that when any one makes-believe politeness to you.’

‘Oh, your *brother* says that, does he?’ said Herbert, laughing.

‘Yes, and sometimes “old rats.” But,’ she continued hurriedly, ‘*he* doesn’t say it. He says *you* all do. My brother is very particular, and very good. Doctor Stout loves him. He is thought very much of in all Christian circles. That book-mark was given to him by one of his classes.’

Every trace of her dimples had vanished. She looked so sweetly grave, and withal so maidenly, sitting there slightly smoothing the lengths of her pink fingers, that Herbert was somewhat embarrassed.

‘But I assure you, Miss Brooks, I was not making-believe. I am really very careless, and everything is so proper—I mean so neat and pretty—here that I——’ he stopped, and observing the same backward wandering of her eye as of a filly about to shy, quickly changed the subject. ‘You have, or are about to have, neighbours?’ he said, glancing towards the windows as he recalled the incident of a moment before.

‘Yes; and they’re not at all nice people. They are from Pike County, and very queer. They came across the plains in ’50. They say “Stranger”; the men are vulgar, and the girls very forward. Tap forbids my ever going to the window and looking at them. They’re quite what you would call “off colour.”’

Herbert, who did not dare to say that he never would have dreamed of using such an expression in any young girl's presence, was plunged in silent consternation.

'Then your brother doesn't approve of them?' he said, at last, awkwardly.

'Oh, not at all. He even talked of having ground-glass put in all these windows, only it would make the light bad.'

Herbert felt very embarrassed. If the mysterious missile came from these objectionable young persons it was evidently because they thought they had detected a more accessible and sympathising individual in the stranger who now occupied the room. He concluded he had better not say anything about it.

Miss Brooks's golden eyelashes were bent towards the floor. 'Do you play sacred music, Mr. Bly?' she said, without raising them.

'I am afraid not.'

'Perhaps you know only negro-minstrel songs?'

'I am afraid—yes.'

'I know one.' The dimples faintly came back again. 'It's called "The Ham-fat Man." Some day when mother isn't in I'll play it for you.'

Then the dimples fled again, and she immediately looked so distressed that Herbert came to her assistance.

'I suppose your brother taught you that too?'

'Oh, dear, no!' she returned, with her frightened glance; 'I only heard him say some

people preferred that kind of thing to sacred music, and one day I saw a copy of it in a music-store window in Clay Street, and bought it. Oh no! Tappington didn't teach it to me.'

In the pleasant discovery that she was at times independent of her brother's perfections, Herbert smiled, and sympathetically drew a step nearer to her. She rose at once, somewhat primly holding back the sides of her skirt, school-girl fashion, with thumb and finger, and her eyes cast down.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Bly.'

'Must you go? Good afternoon.'

She walked directly to the open door, looking very tall and stately as she did so, but without turning towards him. When she reached it

she lifted her eyes; there was the slightest suggestion of a return of her dimples in the relaxation of her grave little mouth. Then she said, 'Good - bye, Mr. Bly,' and departed.

The skirt of her dress rustled for an instant in the passage. Herbert looked after her. 'I wonder if she skipped then—she looks like a girl that might skip at such a time,' he said to himself. 'How very odd she is—and how simple! But I must pull her up in that slang when I know her better. Fancy her brother telling her *that!* What a pair they must be!' Nevertheless, when he turned back into the room again he forbore going to the window to indulge further curiosity in regard to his wicked neighbours. A certain new feeling of respect to his

late companion—and possibly to himself—held him in check. Much as he resented Tappington's perfections, he resented quite as warmly the presumption that he was not quite as perfect, which was implied in that mysterious overture. He glanced at the stool on which she had been sitting with a half-brotherly smile, and put it reverently on one side with a very vivid recollection of her shy maidenly figure. In some mysterious way too the room seemed to have lost its formal strangeness; perhaps it was the touch of individuality—*hers*—that had been wanting? He began thoughtfully to dress himself for his regular dinner at the Poodle Dog Restaurant, and when he left the room he turned back to look once more at the stool where she had sat. Even

on his way to that fast and famous *café* of the period he felt, for the first time in his thoughtless but lonely life, the gentle security of the home he had left behind him.

II

It was three or four days before he became firmly adjusted to his new quarters. During this time he had met Cherry casually on the staircase, in going or coming, and received her shy greetings; but she had not repeated her visit, nor again alluded to it. He had spent part of a formal evening in the parlour in company with a calling deacon, who, unappalled by the Indian shawl for which the widow had exchanged her household cerements on such occasions, appeared to Herbert to have remote matrimonial designs, as far at least as a sym-

pathetic deprecation of the vanities of the present, an echoing of her sighs like a modest encore, a preternatural gentility of manner, a vague allusion to the necessity of bearing 'one another's burdens,' and an everlasting 'promise' in store, would seem to imply. To Herbert's vivid imagination, a discussion on the doctrinal points of last Sabbath's sermon was fraught with delicate suggestion; and an acceptance by the widow of an appointment to attend the Wednesday evening 'Lectures' had all the shy reluctant yielding of a granted rendezvous. Oddly enough, the more formal attitude seemed to be reserved for the young people, who, in the suggestive atmosphere of this spiritual flirtation, alone appeared to preserve the proprieties and, to some extent, decorously chaperon their elders.

Herbert gravely turned the leaves of Cherry's music while she played and sang one or two discreet but depressing songs expressive of her unalterable but proper devotion to her mother's clock, her father's arm-chair, and her aunt's Bible; and Herbert joined somewhat boyishly in the soul-subduing refrain. Only once he ventured to suggest in a whisper that he would like to add *her* music-stool to the adorable inventory; but he was met by such a disturbed and terrified look that he desisted. 'Another night of this wild and reckless dissipation will finish me,' he said lugubriously to himself when he reached the solitude of his room. 'I wonder how many times a week I'd have to help the girl play the spiritual gooseberry downstairs before we could have any fun ourselves?'

Here the sound of distant laughter, interspersed with vivacious feminine shrieks, came through the open window. He glanced between the curtains. His neighbour's house was brilliantly lit, and the shadows of a few romping figures were chasing each other across the muslin shades of the windows. The objectionable young women were evidently enjoying themselves. In some conditions of the mind there is a certain exasperation in the spectacle of unmeaning enjoyment, and he shut the window sharply. At the same moment some one knocked at his door.

It was Miss Brooks, who had just come upstairs.

'Will you please let me have my music-stool?'

He stared at her a moment in surprise, then recovering himself said, 'Yes, certainly,' and brought the stool. For an instant he was tempted to ask why she wanted it, but his pride forbade him.

'Thank you. Good-night.'

'Good-night!'

'I hope it wasn't in your way?'

'Not at all.'

'Good-night!'

'Good-night.'

She vanished. Herbert was perplexed. Between young ladies whose naïve exuberance impelled them to throw handkerchiefs at his window and young ladies whose equally naïve modesty demanded the withdrawal from his bedroom of a chair on which they had once sat, his

lot seemed to have fallen in a troubled locality. Yet a day or two later he heard Cherry practising on the harmonium as he was ascending the stairs on his return from business; she had departed before he entered the room, but had left the music-stool behind her. It was not again removed.

One Sunday, the second or third of his tenancy, when Cherry and her mother were at church, and he had finished some work that he had brought from the bank, his former restlessness and sense of strangeness returned. The regular afternoon fog had thickened early, and driving him back from a cheerless chilly ramble on the hill, had left him still more depressed and solitary. In sheer desperation he moved some of the furniture, and changed the disposition of

several smaller ornaments. Growing bolder, he even attacked the sacred shelf devoted to Tapington's serious literature and moral studies. At first glance the book of sermons looked suspiciously fresh and new for a volume of habitual reference, but its leaves were carefully cut, and contained one or two book-marks. It was only another evidence of that perfect youth's care and neatness. As he was replacing it he noticed a small object folded in white paper at the back of the shelf. To put the book back into its former position it was necessary to take this out. He did so, but its contents slid from his fingers and the paper to the floor. To his utter consternation, looking down he saw a pack of playing cards strewn at his feet!

He hurriedly picked them up. They were

worn and slippery from use, and exhaled a faint odour of tobacco. Had they been left there by some temporary visitor unknown to Tappington and his family, or had they been hastily hidden by a servant? Yet they were of a make and texture superior to those that a servant would possess; looking at them carefully he recognised them to be of a quality used by the better-class gamblers. Restoring them carefully to their former position, he was tempted to take out the other volumes, and was rewarded with the further discovery of a small box of ivory counters, known as 'poker-chips.' It was really very extraordinary! It was quite the *cache* of some habitual gambler. Herbert smiled grimly at the irreverent incongruity of the hiding-place selected by its unknown and mysterious owner

and amused himself by fancying the horror of his sainted predecessor had *he* made the discovery. He determined to replace them, and to put some mark upon the volumes before them in order to detect any future disturbance of them in his absence.

Ought he not to take Miss Brooks in his confidence? Or should he say nothing about it at present, and trust to chance to discover the sacrilegious hider? Could it possibly be Cherry herself, guilty of the same innocent curiosity that had impelled her to buy the 'Ham-fat Man'? Preposterous! Besides, the cards had been used, and she could not play poker alone!

He watched the rolling fog extinguish the line of Russian Hill, the last bit of far perspective from his window. He glanced at his neighbour's

verandah, already dripping with moisture; the windows were blank; he remembered to have heard the girls giggling in passing down the side street on their way to church, and had noticed from behind his own curtains that one was rather pretty. This led him to think of Cherry again, and to recall the quaint yet melancholy grace of her figure as she sat on the stool opposite. Why had she withdrawn it so abruptly; did she consider his jesting allusion to it indecorous and presuming? Had he really meant it seriously; and was he beginning to think too much about her? Would she ever come again? How nice it would be if she returned from church alone early, and they could have a comfortable chat together here! Would she sing the 'Ham-fat Man' for him? Would

the dimples come back if she did? Should he ever know more of this quaint repressed side of her nature? After all, what a dear, graceful, tantalising, lovable creature she was! Ought he not, at all hazards, try to know her better? Might it not be here that he would find a perfect realisation of his boyish dreams, and in *her* all that—what nonsense he was thinking!

Suddenly Herbert was startled by the sound of a light but hurried foot upon the wooden outer step of his second door, and the quick but ineffective turning of the door-handle. He started to his feet, his mind still filled with a vision of Cherry. Then he as suddenly remembered that he had locked the door on going out, putting the key in his overcoat pocket. He had returned by the front door, and

his overcoat was now hanging in the lower hall.

The door again rattled impetuously. Then it was supplemented by a female voice in a hurried whisper : ‘ Open quick, can’t you ? Do hurry ! ’

He was confounded. The voice was authoritative, not unmusical ; but was *not* Cherry’s. Nevertheless he called out quickly : ‘ One moment, please, and I’ll get the key ! ’ dashed downstairs and up again, breathlessly unlocked the door and threw it open.

Nobody was there !

He ran out into the street. On one side it terminated abruptly on the cliff on which his dwelling was perched. On the other, it descended more gradually into the next thoroughfare ; but up and down the street, on either

hand, no one was to be seen. A slightly superstitious feeling for an instant crept over him. Then he reflected that the mysterious visitor could in the interval of his getting the key have easily slipped down the steps of the cliff or entered the shrubbery of one of the adjacent houses. But why had she not waited? And what did she want? As he re-entered his door he mechanically raised his eyes to the windows of his neighbour's. This time he certainly was not mistaken. The two amused mischievous faces that suddenly disappeared behind the curtain as he looked up showed that the incident had not been unwitnessed. Yet it was impossible that it could have been either of *them*. Their house was only accessible by a long détour. It might have been the trick of a confederate;

but the tone of half familiarity and half entreaty in the unseen visitor's voice dispelled the idea of any collusion. He entered the room and closed the door angrily. A grim smile stole over his face as he glanced around at the dainty saint-like appointments of the absent Tappington, and thought what that irreproachable young man would have said to the indecorous intrusion, even though it had been a mistake. Would those shameless Pike County girls have dared to laugh at *him*?

But he was again puzzled to know why he himself should have been selected for this singular experience. Why was *he* considered fair game for these girls? And, for the matter of that, now that he reflected upon it, why had even this gentle, refined, and melancholy Cherry

thought it necessary to talk slang to *him* on their first acquaintance, and offer to sing him the 'Ham-fat Man'? It was true he had been a little gay; but never dissipated. Of course he was not a saint, like Tappington—oh, *that* was it! He believed he understood it now. He was suffering from that extravagant conception of what worldliness consists of, so common to very good people with no knowledge of the world. Compared to Tappington, he was in their eyes, of course, a rake and a roué. The explanation pleased him. He would not keep it to himself. He would gain Cherry's confidence and enlist her sympathies. Her gentle nature would revolt at this injustice to their lonely lodger. She would see that there were degrees of goodness besides her brother's. She would

perhaps sit on that stool again and *not* sing the 'Ham-fat Man.'

A day or two afterwards the opportunity seemed offered to him. As he was coming home and ascending the long hilly street, his eye was taken by a tall graceful figure just preceding him. It was she. He had never before seen her in the street, and was now struck with her ladylike bearing and the grave superiority of her perfectly simple attire. In a thoroughfare haunted by handsome women and striking toilettes, the refined grace of her mourning costume, and a certain stateliness that gave her the look of a young widow, was a contrast that evidently attracted others than himself. It was with an odd mingling of pride and jealousy that he watched the admiring yet respectful glances of the

passers-by, some of whom turned to look again, and one or two to retrace their steps and follow her at a decorous distance. This caused him to quicken his own pace, with a new anxiety and a remorseful sense of wasted opportunity. What a booby he had been, not to have made more of his contiguity to this charming girl—to have been frightened at the naïve decorum of her maidenly instincts! He reached her side, and raised his hat with a trepidation at her new-found graces—with a boldness that was defiant of her other admirers. She blushed slightly.

‘I thought you’d overtake me before,’ she said naïvely. ‘*I saw you ever so long ago.*’

He stammered, with an equal simplicity, that he had not dared to.

She looked a little frightened again, and then

said hurriedly: 'I only thought that I would meet you on Montgomery Street, and we would walk home together, I don't like to go out alone, and mother cannot always go with me. Tappington never cared to take me out—I don't know why. I think he didn't like the people staring and stopping us. But they stare more—don't you think?—when one is alone.

'So I thought if you were coming straight home, we might come together—unless you have something else to do?'

Herbert impulsively reiterated his joy at meeting her, and averred that no other engagement, either of business or pleasure, could or would stand in his way. Looking up, however, it was with some consternation that he

saw they were already within a block of the house.

‘Suppose we take a turn around the hill and come back by the old street down the steps?’ he suggested earnestly.

The next moment he regretted it; the frightened look returned to her eyes; her face became melancholy and formal again.

‘No!’ she said quickly. ‘That would be taking a walk with you like these young girls and their young men on Saturdays. That’s what Ellen does with the butcher’s boy on Sundays, Tappington often used to meet them. Doing the “Come, Philanders,” as he says you call it.’

It struck Herbert that the didactic Tappington’s method of inculcating a horror of slang in

his sister's breast was open to some objection; but they were already on the steps of their house, and he was too much mortified at the reception of his last unhappy suggestion to make the confidential disclosure he had intended even if there had still been time.

'There's mother waiting for me,' she said, after an awkward pause, pointing to the figure of Mrs. Brooks dimly outlined on the verandah. 'I suppose she was beginning to be worried about my being out alone. She'll be so glad I met you.' It didn't appear to Herbert, however, that Mrs. Brooks exhibited any extravagant joy over the occurrence, and she almost instantly retired with her daughter into the sitting-room linking her arm in Cherry's, and, as it were empanoplying her with her own invulnerable

shawl. Herbert went to his room more dissatisfied with himself than ever.

Two or three days elapsed without his seeing Cherry; even the well-known rustle of her skirt in the passage was missing. On the third evening he resolved to bear the formal terrors of the drawing-room again, and stumbled upon a decorous party consisting of Mrs. Brooks, the deacon, and the pastor's wife — but not Cherry. It struck him on entering that the momentary awkwardness of the company and the formal beginning of a new topic indicated that *he* had been the subject of their previous conversation. In this idea he continued, through that vague spirit of opposition which attacks impulsive people in such circumstances, to generally disagree with them on all subjects,

and to exaggerate what he chose to believe they thought objectionable in him. He did not remain long; but learned in that brief interval that Cherry had gone to visit a friend in Contra Costa, and would be absent a fortnight; and he was conscious that the information was conveyed to him with a peculiar significance.

The result of which was only to intensify his interest in the absent Cherry, and for a week to plunge him in a sea of conflicting doubts and resolutions. At one time he thought seriously of demanding an explanation from Mrs. Brooks, and of confiding to her—as he had intended to do to Cherry—his fears that his character had been misinterpreted, and his reasons for believing so. But here he was met

by the difficulty of formulating what he wished to have explained, and some doubts as to whether his confidences were prudent. At another time he contemplated a serious imitation of Tappington's perfections, a renunciation of the world, and an entire change in his habits. He would go regularly to church—*her* church, and take up Tappington's desolate Bible-class. But here the torturing doubt arose whether a young lady who betrayed a certain secular curiosity, and who had evidently depended upon her brother for a knowledge of the world, would entirely like it. At times he thought of giving up the room, and abandoning for ever this doubly dangerous proximity; but here again he was deterred by the difficulty of giving a satisfactory reason to his employer, who had pro-

cured it as a favour. His passion—for such he began to fear it to be—led him once to the extravagance of asking a day's holiday from the bank, which he vaguely spent in the streets of Oakland in the hope of accidentally meeting the exiled Cherry.

III

THE fortnight slowly passed. She returned, but he did not see her. She was always out or engaged in her room with some female friend when Herbert was at home. This was singular, as she had never appeared to him as a young girl who was fond of visiting or had ever affected female friendships. In fact, there was little doubt now that, wittingly or unwittingly, she was avoiding him.

He was moodily sitting by the fire one evening, having returned early from dinner. In reply to his habitual but affectedly careless

inquiry, Ellen had told him that Mrs. Brooks was confined to her room by a slight headache, and that Miss Brooks was out. He was trying to read, and listening to the wind that occasionally rattled the casement and caused the solitary gas-lamp that was visible in the side street to flicker and leap wildly. Suddenly he heard the same footfall upon his outer step and a light tap at the door. Determined this time to solve the mystery, he sprang to his feet, and ran to the door; but to his anger and astonishment it was locked and the key was gone. Yet he was positive that *he* had not taken it out.

The tap was timidly repeated. In desperation he called out: 'Please don't go away yet. The key is gone; but I'll find it in a moment. Nevertheless he was at his wits' end.

There was a hesitating pause and then the sound of a key cautiously thrust into the lock. It turned; the door opened, and a tall figure, whose face and form were completely hidden in a veil and long gray shawl, quickly glided into the room and closed the door behind it. Then it suddenly raised its arms, the shawl was parted, the veil fell aside, and Cherry stood before him!

Her face was quite pale. Her eyes, usually downcast, frightened, or coldly clear, were bright and beautiful with excitement. The dimples were faintly there, although the smile was sad and half hysterical. She remained standing, erect and tall, her arms dropped at her side, holding the veil and shawl that still depended from her shoulders.

‘So — I’ve caught you!’ she said with a strange little laugh. ‘Oh yes. “Please don’t go away yet I’ll get the key in a moment,”’ she continued, mimicking his recent utterance.

He could only stammer, ‘Miss Brooks—then it was *you*?’

‘Yes; and you thought it was *she*, didn’t you? Well, and you’re caught! I didn’t believe it; I wouldn’t believe it when they said it. I determined to find it out myself. And I have, and it’s true.’

Unable to determine whether she was serious or jesting, and conscious only of his delight at seeing her again, he advanced impulsively. But her expression instantly changed: she became at once stiff and school-girlishly formal, and stepped back towards the door.

‘Don’t come near me, or I’ll go,’ she said quickly, with her hand upon the lock.

‘But not before you tell me what you mean,’ he said half laughingly half earnestly. ‘Who is *she*? and what wouldn’t you have believed? For upon my honour, Miss Brooks, I don’t know what you are talking about.’

His evident frankness and truthful manner appeared to puzzle her. ‘You mean to say you were expecting no one?’ she said sharply.

‘I assure you I was not.’

‘And—and no woman was ever here—at that door?’

He hesitated. ‘Not to-night—not for a long time; not since you returned from Oakland.’

‘Then there *was* one?’

‘I believe so.’

'You *believe*—you don't *know* ?'

'I believed it was a woman from her voice : for the door was locked, and the key was downstairs. When I fetched it, and opened the door, she—or whoever it was—was gone.'

'And that's why you said so imploringly, just now, "Please don't go away yet?" You see I've caught you. Ah! I don't wonder you blush!'

If he had, his cheeks had caught fire from her brilliant eyes and the extravagantly affected sternness—as of a school-girl monitor—in her animated face. Certainly he had never seen such a transformation.

'Yes; but, you see, I wanted to know who the intruder was,' he said, smiling at his own embarrassment.

‘You did—well, perhaps *that* will tell you?’

It was found under your door before I went away.’ She suddenly produced from her pocket a folded paper, and handed it to him. It was a misspelt scrawl, and ran as follows:—

‘Why are you so cruel? Why do you keep me dancing on the steps before them gurls at the windows? Was it that stuck-up Saint, Miss Brooks, that you were afraid of, my deer? Oh, you faithless trater! Wait till I ketch you! I’ll tear your eyes out and hern!’

It did not require great penetration for Herbert to be instantly convinced that the writer of this vulgar epistle and the owner of the unknown voice were two very different individuals. The note was evidently a trick. A suspicion of its perpetrators flashed upon him.

‘Whoever the woman was, it was not she who wrote the note,’ he said positively. ‘Some-

body must have seen her at the door. I remember now that those girls—your neighbours—were watching me from their window when I came out. Depend upon it, that letter comes from them.'

Cherry's eyes opened widely with a sudden childlike perception, and then shyly dropped. 'Yes,' she said slowly; 'they *did* watch you. They know it, for it was they who made it the talk of the neighbourhood, and that's how it came to mother's ears.' She stopped, and, with a frightened look, stepped back towards the door again.

'Then *that* was why your mother——'

'Oh yes,' interrupted Cherry quickly. 'That was why I went over to Oakland, and why mother forbade my walking with you again, and

why she had a talk with friends about your conduct, and why she came near telling Mr. Carstone all about it until I stopped her.' She checked herself—he could hardly believe his eyes—the pale nun-like girl was absolutely blushing.

'I thank you, Miss Brooks,' he said gravely, 'for your thoughtfulness, although I hope I could have still proven my innocence to Mr. Carstone, even if some unknown woman tried my door by mistake, and was seen doing it. But I am pained to think that *you* could have believed me capable of so wanton and absurd an impropriety—and such a gross disrespect to your mother's house.'

'But,' said Cherry with child-like naïveté, 'you know *you* don't think anything of such things, and that's what I told mother.'

‘You told your mother *that*?’

‘Oh yes—I told her Tappington says it’s quite common with young men. Please don’t laugh—for it’s very dreadful. Tappington didn’t laugh when he told it to me as a warning. He was shocked.’

‘But, my dear Miss Brooks——’

‘There—now you’re angry—and that’s as bad. Are you sure you didn’t know that woman?’

‘Positive!’

‘Yet you seemed very anxious just now that she should wait till you opened the door.’

‘That was perfectly natural.’

‘I don’t think it was natural at all.’

‘But—according to Tappington——’

‘Because my brother is very good you need not make fun of him.’

‘I assure you I have no such intention. But what more can I say? I give you my word that I don’t know who that unlucky woman was. No doubt she may have been some nearsighted neighbour who had mistaken the house, and I daresay was as thoroughly astonished at my voice as I was at hers. Can I say more? Is it necessary for me to swear that since I have been here no woman has ever entered that door—but——’

‘But whom?’

‘Yourself.’

‘I know what you mean,’ she said hurriedly, with her old frightened look, gliding to the outer door. ‘It’s shameful what I’ve done. But I only did it because—because—I had faith in you, and didn’t believe what they

said was true.' She had already turned the lock. There were tears in her pretty eyes.

'Stop,' said Herbert gently. He walked slowly towards her, and within reach of her frightened figure stopped with the timid respect of a mature and genuine passion. 'You must not be seen going out of that door,' he said gravely. 'You must let me go first, and, when I am gone, lock the door again and go through the hall to your own room. No one must know that I was in the house when you came in at that door. Good-night.'

Without offering his hand he lifted his eyes to her face. The dimples were all there—and something else. He bowed and passed out.

Ten minutes later he ostentatiously returned

to the house by the front door, and proceeded up the stairs to his own room. As he cast a glance around he saw that the music-stool had been moved before the fire, evidently with the view of attracting his attention. Lying upon it, carefully folded, was the veil that she had worn. There could be no doubt that it was left there purposely. With a smile at this strange girl's last characteristic act of timid but compromising recklessness, after all his precautions, he raised it tenderly to his lips, and then hastened to hide it from the reach of vulgar eyes. But had Cherry known that its temporary resting-place that night was under his pillow she might have doubted his superior caution.

When he returned from the bank the next

afternoon, Cherry rapped ostentatiously at his door: 'Mother wishes me to ask you,' she began with a certain prim formality, which nevertheless did not preclude dimples, 'if you would give us the pleasure of your company at our Church Festival to-night? There will be a concert and a collation. You could accompany us there if you cared. Our friends and Tappington's would be so glad to see you, and Dr. Stout would be delighted to make your acquaintance.'

'Certainly!' said Herbert, delighted and yet astounded. 'Then,' he added in a lower voice, 'your mother no longer believes me so dreadfully culpable?'

'Oh no,' said Cherry in a hurried whisper, glancing up and down the passage, 'I've been

talking to her about it, and she is satisfied that it is all a jealous trick and slander of these neighbours. Why, I told her that they had even said that *I* was that mysterious woman; that I came that way to you because she had forbidden my seeing you openly.'

'What! You dared say that?'

'Yes; don't you see? Suppose they said they *had* seen me coming in last night—*that* answers it,' she said triumphantly.

'Oh, it does?' he said vacantly.

'Perfectly. So you see she's convinced that she ought to put you on the same footing as Tappington, before everybody; and then there won't be any trouble. You'll come, won't you? It won't be so *very* good. And then, I've told mother that as there have been so

many street-fights, and so much talk about the Vigilance Committee lately, I ought to have somebody for an escort when I am coming home. And, if you're known, you see, as one of *us*, there'll be no harm in your meeting me.'

'Thank you,' he said, extending his hand gratefully.

Her fingers rested a moment in his. 'Where did you put it?' she said demurely.

'It? Oh! *it's* all safe,' he said quickly, but somewhat vaguely.

'But I don't call the upper drawer of your bureau safe,' she returned poutingly, 'where *everybody* can go. So you'll find it *now* inside the harmonium, on the keyboard.'

'Oh, thank you.'

'It's quite natural to have left it there *accidentally*—isn't it?' she said imploringly, assisted by all her dimples. Alas! she had forgotten that he was still holding her hand. Consequently, she had not time to snatch it away and vanish, with a stifled little cry, before it had been pressed two or three times to his lips. A little ashamed of his own boldness, Herbert remained for a few moments in the doorway listening, and looking uneasily down the dark passage. Presently a slight sound came over the fanlight of Cherry's room. Could he believe his ears? The saint-like Cherry—no doubt tutored, for example's sake, by the perfect Tappington—was softly whistling.

In this simple fashion the first pages of this little idyl were quietly turned. The book

might have been closed or laid aside even then. But it so chanced that Cherry was an unconscious prophet; and presently it actually became a prudential necessity for her to have a masculine escort when she walked out. For a growing state of lawlessness and crime culminated one day in the deep tocsin of the Vigilance Committee, and at its stroke fifty thousand peaceful men, reverting to the first principles of social safety, sprang to arms, assembled at their quarters, or patrolled the streets. In another hour the city of San Francisco was in the hands of a mob—the most peaceful, orderly, well organised, and temperate the world had ever known, and yet in conception as lawless, autocratic, and imperious as the conditions it opposed.

IV

HERBERT, enrolled in the same section with his employer and one or two fellow-clerks, had participated in the meetings of the committee with the light-heartedness and irresponsibility of youth, regretting only the loss of his usual walk with Cherry and the hours that kept him from her house. He was returning from a protracted meeting one night when the number of arrests and searching for proscribed and suspected characters had been so large as to induce fears of organised resistance and rescue, and on reaching the foot of the

hill found it already so late, that to avoid disturbing the family he resolved to enter his room directly by the door in the side street. On inserting his key in the lock it met with some resisting obstacle, which, however, yielded and apparently dropped on the mat inside. Opening the door and stepping into the perfectly dark apartment, he trod upon this object, which proved to be another key. The family must have procured it for their convenience during his absence, and after locking the door had carelessly left it in the lock. It was lucky that it had yielded so readily.

The fire had gone out. He closed the door and lit the gas, and after taking off his overcoat moved to the door leading into the passage to listen if anybody was still stirring. To his utter

astonishment he found it locked. What was more remarkable—the key was also *inside* ! An inexplicable feeling took possession of him. He glanced suddenly around the room, and then his eye fell upon the bed. Lying there, stretched at full length, was the recumbent figure of a man.

He was apparently in the profound sleep of utter exhaustion. The attitude of his limbs and the order of his dress—of which only his collar and cravat had been loosened—showed that sleep must have overtaken him almost instantly. In fact the bed was scarcely disturbed beyond the actual impress of his figure. He seemed to be a handsome matured man of about forty; his dark straight hair was a little thinned over the temples, although his long heavy moustache was still youthful and virgin. His clothes, which

were elegantly cut and of finer material than that in ordinary use, the delicacy and neatness of his linen, the whiteness of his hands, and, more particularly, a certain dissipated pallor of complexion and lines of recklessness on the brow and cheek, indicated to Herbert that the man before him was one of that desperate and suspected class—some of whose proscribed members he had been hunting—the professional gambler!

Possibly the magnetism of Herbert's intent and astonished gaze affected him. He moved slightly, half opened his eyes, said 'Halloo, Tap,' rubbed them again, wholly opened them, fixed them with a lazy stare on Herbert, and said—

'Now, who the devil are you?'

'I think *I* have the right to ask that question

considering that this is my room,' said Herbert sharply.

'Your room?'

'Yes!'

The stranger half raised himself on his elbow glanced round the room, settled himself slowly back on the pillows with his hands clasped lightly behind his head, dropped his eyelids, smiled, and said—

'Rats!'

'What?' demanded Herbert, with a resentful sense of sacrilege to Cherry's virgin slang.

'Well, old rats then! D'ye think I don't know this shebang? Look here, Johnny, what are you putting on all this side for, eh? What's your little game? Where's Tappington?'

'If you mean Mr. Brooks, the son of this

house, who formerly lived in this room,' replied Herbert, with a formal precision intended to show a doubt of the stranger's knowledge of Tappington, 'you ought to know that he has left town.'

'Left town!' echoed the stranger, raising himself again. 'Oh, I see! getting rather too warm for him here? Humph! I ought to have thought of that. Well, you know he *did* take mighty big risks, anyway!' He was silent a moment, with his brows knit and a rather dangerous expression in his handsome face. 'So some d——d hound gave him away—eh?'

'I hadn't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Brooks except by reputation, as the respected son of the lady upon whose house you have just intruded,' said Herbert frigidly, yet with a creeping consciousness of some unpleasant revelation.

The stranger stared at him for a moment, again looked carefully round the room, and then suddenly dropped his head back on the pillow, and with his white hands over his eyes and mouth tried to restrain a spasm of silent laughter. After an effort he succeeded, wiped his moist eyes, and sat up.

‘So you didn’t know Tappington, eh?’ he said, lazily buttoning his collar.

‘No.’

‘No more do I.’

He retied his cravat, yawned, rose, shook himself perfectly neat again, and going to Herbert’s dressing-table quietly took up a brush and began to lightly brush himself, occasionally turning to the window to glance out. Presently he turned to Herbert and said—

‘ Well, Johnny, what’s your name ? ’

‘ I am Herbert Bly, of Carstone’s Bank. ’

‘ So, and a member of this same Vigilance Committee, I reckon, ’ he continued.

‘ Yes. ’

‘ Well, Mr. Bly, I owe you an apology for coming here, and some thanks for the only sleep I’ve had in forty-eight hours. I struck this old shebang at about ten o’clock, and it’s now two, so I reckon I’ve put in about four hours’ square sleep. Now, look here. ’ He beckoned Herbert towards the window. ‘ Do you see those three men standing under that gaslight ? Well, they’re part of a gang of Vigilantes who’ve hunted me to the hill, and are waiting to see me come out of the bushes, where they reckon I’m hiding. Go to them and say that I’m here

Tell them you've got Gentleman George—George Dornton, the man they've been hunting for a week—in this room. I promise you I won't stir, nor kick up a row, when they've come. Do it, and Carstone, if he's a square man, will raise your salary for it, and promote you.' He yawned slightly, and then slowly looking around him, drew the easy-chair towards him and dropped comfortably in it, gazing at the astounded and motionless Herbert with a lazy smile.

'You're wondering what my little game is, Johnny, ain't you? Well, I'll tell you. What with being hunted from pillar to post, putting my old pards to no end of trouble, and then slipping up on it whenever I think I've got a sure thing like this'—he cast an almost

affectionate glance at the bed—‘I’ve come to the conclusion that it’s played out, and I might as well hand in my checks. It’s only a question of my being *run out* of ’Frisco, or hiding until I can *slip out* myself; and I’ve reckoned I might as well give them the trouble and expense of transportation. And if I can put a good thing in your way in doing it—why, it will sort of make things square with you for the fuss I’ve given you.’

Even in the stupefaction and helplessness of knowing that the man before him was the notorious duellist and gambler George Dornton, one of the first marked for deportation by the Vigilance Committee, Herbert recognised all he had heard of his invincible coolness, courage, and almost philosophic fatalism. For an instant

his youthful imagination checked even his indignation. When he recovered himself, he said with rising colour and boyish vehemence—

‘Whoever *you* may be, I am neither a police officer nor a spy. You have no right to insult me by supposing that I would profit by the mistake that made you my guest, or that I would refuse you the sanctuary of the roof that covers your insult as well as your blunder.’

The stranger gazed at him with an amused expression, and then rose and stretched out his hand.

‘Shake, Mr. Bly! You’re the only man that ever kicked George Dornton when he deserved it. Good-night!’ He took his hat and walked to the door.

‘Stop!’ said Herbert impulsively; ‘the night

is already far gone; go back and finish your sleep.'

'You mean it?'

'I do.'

The stranger turned, walked back to the bed, unfastening his coat and collar as he did so, and laid himself down in the attitude of a moment before.

'I will call you in the morning,' continued Herbert. 'By that time'—he hesitated—'by that time—your pursuers may have given up their search. One word more. You will be frank with me?'

'Go on.'

'Tappington and you are—friends?'

'Well—yes.'

'His mother and sister know nothing of this?'

'I reckon he didn't boast of it. *I* didn't. Is that all?' sleepily.

'Yes.'

'Don't *you* worry about *him*. Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

But even at that moment George Dornton had dropped off in a quiet peaceful sleep.

Bly turned down the light, and, drawing his easy-chair to the window, dropped into it in bewildering reflection. This then was the secret — unknown to mother and daughter — unsuspected by all! This was the double life of Tappington, half revealed in his flirtation with the neighbours, in the hidden cards behind the books, in the mysterious visitor — still unaccounted for — and now wholly exploded by this sleeping confederate, for whom, somehow,

Herbert felt the greatest sympathy! What was to be done? What should he say to Cherry—to her mother—to Mr. Carstone? Yet he had felt he had done right. From time to time he turned to the motionless recumbent shadow on the bed and listened to its slow and peaceful respiration. Apart from that undefinable attraction which all original natures have for each other, the thrice-blessed mystery of protection of the helpless, for the first time in his life, seemed to dawn upon him through that night.

Nevertheless, the actual dawn came slowly. Twice he nodded and awoke quickly with a start. The third time it was day. The street-lamps were extinguished, and with them the moving restless watchers seemed also to have vanished. Suddenly a formal deliberate rapping at the

door leading to the hall startled him to his feet.

It must be Ellen. So much the better ; he could quickly get rid of her. He glanced at the bed ; Dornton slept on undisturbed. He unlocked the door cautiously, and instinctively fell back before the erect, shawled, and decorous figure of Mrs. Brooks. But an utterly new resolution and excitement had supplanted the habitual resignation of her handsome features, and given them an angry sparkle of expression.

Recollecting himself, he instantly stepped forward into the passage, drawing to the door behind him, as she, with equal celerity, opposed it with her hand.

‘Mr. Bly,’ she said deliberately, ‘Ellen has just told me that your voice has been heard in

conversation with some one in this room late last night. Up to this moment I have foolishly allowed my daughter to persuade me that certain infamous scandals regarding your conduct here were false. I must ask you as a gentleman to let me pass now and satisfy myself.'

'But, my dear madam, one moment. Let me first explain—I beg——' stammered Herbert with a half-hysterical laugh. 'I assure you a gentleman friend——'

But she had pushed him aside and entered precipitately. With a quick feminine glance round the room, she turned to the bed, and then halted in overwhelming confusion.

'It's a friend,' said Herbert in a hasty whisper. 'A friend of mine who returned with me late, and whom, on account of the disturbed state of

the streets, I induced to stay here all night. He was so tired that I have not had the heart to disturb him yet.'

'Oh, pray don't!—I beg——' said Mrs. Brooks with a certain youthful vivacity, but still gazing at the stranger's handsome features as she slowly retreated 'Not for worlds!'

Herbert was relieved; she was actually blushing.

'You see, it was quite unpremeditated, I assure you. We came in together,' whispered Herbert, leading her to the door, 'and I——'

'Don't believe a word of it, madam,' said a lazy voice from the bed, as the stranger leisurely raised himself upright, putting the last finishing touch to his cravat as he shook himself neat again. 'I'm an utter stranger to him, and he knows it. He found me here, hiding from the

Vigilantes, who were chasing me on the hill. I got in at that door, which happened to be unlocked. He let me stay because he was a gentleman — and — I — wasn't. I beg your pardon, madam, for having interrupted him before you; but it was a little rough to have him lie on *my* account when he wasn't the kind of man to lie on his *own*. You'll forgive him—won't you, please?—and, as I'm taking myself off now, perhaps you'll overlook *my* intrusion too.'

It was impossible to convey the lazy frankness of this speech, the charming smile with which it was accompanied, or the easy yet deferential manner with which, taking up his hat, he bowed to Mrs. Brooks as he advanced towards the door.

'But,' said Mrs. Brooks, hurriedly glancing

from Herbert to the stranger, 'it must be the Vigilantes who are now hanging about the street. Ellen saw them from her window, and thought they were *your* friends, Mr. Bly. This gentleman — your friend' — she had become a little confused in her novel excitement — 'really ought not to go out now. It would be madness.'

'If you wouldn't mind his remaining a little longer, it certainly would be safer,' said Herbert with wondering gratitude.

'I certainly shouldn't consent to his leaving my house now,' said Mrs. Brooks with dignity; 'and if you wouldn't mind calling Cherry here, Mr. Bly—she's in the dining-room—and then showing yourself for a moment in the street and finding out what they wanted, it would be the best thing to do.'

Herbert flew downstairs; in a few hurried words he gave the same explanation to the astounded Cherry that he had given to her mother, with the mischievous addition that Mrs Brooks's unjust suspicions had precipitated her into becoming an amicable accomplice, and then ran out into the street. Here he ascertained from one of the Vigilantes whom he knew, that they were really seeking Dornton; but that, concluding that the fugitive had already escaped to the wharves, they expected to withdraw their surveillance at noon. Somewhat relieved, he hastened back, to find the stranger calmly seated on the sofa in the parlour with the same air of frank indifference, lazily relating the incidents of his flight to the two women, who were listening with every expression of sympathy and interest.

‘Poor fellow!’ said Cherry, taking the astonished Bly aside into the hall, ‘I don’t believe he’s half as bad as *they* said he is—or as even *he* makes himself out to be. But *did* you notice mother?’

Herbert, a little dazed, and, it must be confessed, a trifle uneasy at this ready acceptance of the stranger, abstractedly said he had not.

‘Why, it’s the most ridiculous thing. She’s actually going round *without her shawl*, and doesn’t seem to know it.’

V

WHEN Herbert finally reached the bank that morning he was still in a state of doubt and perplexity. He had parted with his grateful visitor, whose safety in a few hours seemed assured, but without the least further revelation or actual allusion to anything antecedent to his selecting Tappington's room as refuge. More than that, Herbert was convinced from his manner that he had no intention of making a confidant of Mrs. Brooks, and this convinced him that Dornton's previous relations with Tappington were not only utterly inconsistent with that

young man's decorous reputation, but were unexpected by the family. The stranger's familiar knowledge of the room, his mysterious allusions to the 'risks' Tappington had taken and his sudden silence on the discovery of Bly's ignorance of the whole affair—all pointed to some secret that, innocent or not, was more or less perilous, not only to the son but to the mother and sister. Of the latter's ignorance he had no doubt—but had he any right to enlighten them? Admitting that Tappington had deceived them with the others, would they thank him for opening their eyes to it? If they had already a suspicion, would they care to know that it was shared by him? Halting between his frankness and his delicacy, the final thought that in his budding relations with the daughter it might

seem a cruel bid for her confidence, or a revenge for their distrust of him, inclined him to silence. But an unforeseen occurrence took the matter from his hands. At noon he was told that Mr. Carstone wished to see him in his private room!

Satisfied that his complicity with Dornton's escape was discovered, the unfortunate Herbert presented himself, pale but self-possessed, before his employer. That brief man of business bade him be seated, and standing himself before the fireplace, looked down curiously, but not unkindly, upon his employé.

'Mr. Bly, the bank does not usually interfere with the private affairs of its employés, but for certain reasons which I prefer to explain to you later, I must ask you to give me a straightforward answer to one or two questions. I may

say that they have nothing to do with your relations to the bank, which are to us perfectly satisfactory.'

More than ever convinced that Mr. Carstone was about to speak about his visitor, Herbert signified his willingness to reply.

'You have been seen a great deal with Miss Brooks lately—on the street and elsewhere—acting as her escort, and evidently on terms of intimacy. To do you both justice, neither of you seemed to have made it a secret or avoided observation; but I must ask you directly if it is with her mother's permission?'

Considerably relieved, but wondering what was coming, Herbert answered, with boyish frankness, that it was.

'Are you—engaged to the young lady?'

‘No, sir.’

‘Are you—well, Mr. Bly—briefly, are you what is called “in love” with her?’ asked the banker, with a certain brusque hurrying over of a sentiment evidently incompatible with their present business surroundings.

Herbert blushed. It was the first time he had heard the question voiced, even by himself.

‘I am,’ he said resolutely.

‘And you wish to marry her?’

‘If I dared ask her to accept a young man with no position as yet,’ stammered Herbert.

‘People don’t usually consider a young man in Carstone’s Bank of no position,’ said the banker drily; ‘and I wish for your sake *that* were the only impediment. For I am compelled

to reveal to you a secret.' He paused, and folding his arms, looked fixedly down upon his clerk. 'Mr. Bly, Tappington Brooks, the brother of your sweetheart, was a defaulter and embezzler from this bank!'

Herbert sat dumbfounded and motionless.

'Understand two things,' continued Mr. Carstone quickly. 'First, that no purer or better women exist than Miss Brooks and her mother. Secondly, that they know nothing of this, and that only myself and one other man are in possession of the secret.'

He slightly changed his position, and went on more deliberately. 'Six weeks ago Tappington sat in that chair where you are sitting now, a convicted hypocrite and thief. Luckily for him, although his guilt was plain, and the whole

secret of his double life revealed to me, a sum of money advanced in pity by one of his gambling confederates had made his accounts good and saved him from suspicion in the eyes of his fellow-clerks and my partners. At first he tried to fight me on that point; then he blustered and said his mother could have refunded the money; and asked me what was a paltry five thousand dollars! I told him, Mr. Bly, that it might be five years of his youth in State prison; that it might be five years of sorrow and shame for his mother and sister; that it might be an everlasting stain on the name of his dead father—my friend. He talked of killing himself: I told him he was a cowardly fool. He asked me to give him up to the authorities: I told him I intended to take the law in my own hands and give him

another chance; and then he broke down. I transferred him that very day, without giving him time to communicate with anybody, to our branch office at Portland, with a letter explaining his position to our agent, and the strict injunction that for six months he should be under strict surveillance. I myself undertook to explain his sudden departure to Mrs. Brooks, and obliged him to write to her from time to time.' He paused, and then continued. 'So far I believe my plan has been successful: the secret has been kept; he has broken with the evil associates that ruined him here — to the best of my knowledge he has had no communication with them since; even a certain woman here who shared his vicious hidden life has abandoned him.'

'Are you sure?' asked Herbert involuntarily, as he recalled his mysterious visitor.

'I believe the Vigilance Committee has considered it a public duty to deport her and her confederates beyond the State,' returned Carstone drily.

Another idea flashed upon Herbert. 'And the gambler who advanced the money to save Tappington?' he said breathlessly.

'Wasn't such a hound as the rest of his kind, if report says true,' answered Carstone. 'He was well known here as George Dornton—Gentleman George—a man capable of better things. But he was before your time, Mr. Bly—*you* don't know him.'

Herbert didn't deem it a felicitous moment to correct his employer, and Mr. Carstone con-

tinued. 'I have now told you what I thought it was my duty to tell you. I must leave *you* to judge how far it affects your relations with Miss Brooks.'

Herbert did not hesitate. 'I should be very sorry, sir, to seem to undervalue your consideration or disregard your warning; but I am afraid that even if you had been less merciful to Tappington, and he were now a convicted felon, I should change neither my feelings nor my intentions to his sister.'

'And you would still marry her?' said Carstone sternly; '*you*, an employé of the bank, would set the example of allying yourself with one who had robbed it?'

'I — am afraid I would, sir,' said Herbert slowly.

‘Even if it were a question of your remaining here?’ said Carstone grimly.

Poor Herbert already saw himself dismissed, and again taking up his weary quest for employment; but, nevertheless, he answered stoutly—

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And nothing will prevent you marrying Miss Brooks?’

‘Nothing—save my inability to support her.’

‘Then,’ said Mr. Carstone, with a peculiar light in his eyes, ‘it only remains for the bank to mark its opinion of your conduct by *increasing your salary to enable you to do so!* Shake hands, Mr. Bly,’ he said, laughing. ‘I think you’ll do to tie to—and I believe the young lady will be of the same opinion. But not a word to either her or her mother in regard

to what you have heard. And now I may tell you something more. I am not without hope of Tappington's future, nor—d——n it—without some excuse for his fault, sir. He was artificially brought up. When my old friend died, Mrs. Brooks, still a handsome woman like all her sex, wouldn't rest until she had another devotion, and wrapped herself and her children up in the Church. Theology may be all right for grown people, but it's apt to make children artificial; and Tappington was pious before he was fairly good. He drew on a religious credit before he had a moral capital behind it. He was brought up with no knowledge of the world, and when he went into it—it captured him. I don't say there are not saints born into the world occasionally; but for every

one, you'll find a lot of promiscuous human nature. My old friend, Josh Brooks, had a heap of it, and it wouldn't be strange if some was left in his children, and burst through their strait-lacing in a queer way. That's all! Good-morning, Mr. Bly. Forget what I've told you for six months, and then I shouldn't wonder if Tappington was on hand to give his sister away.'

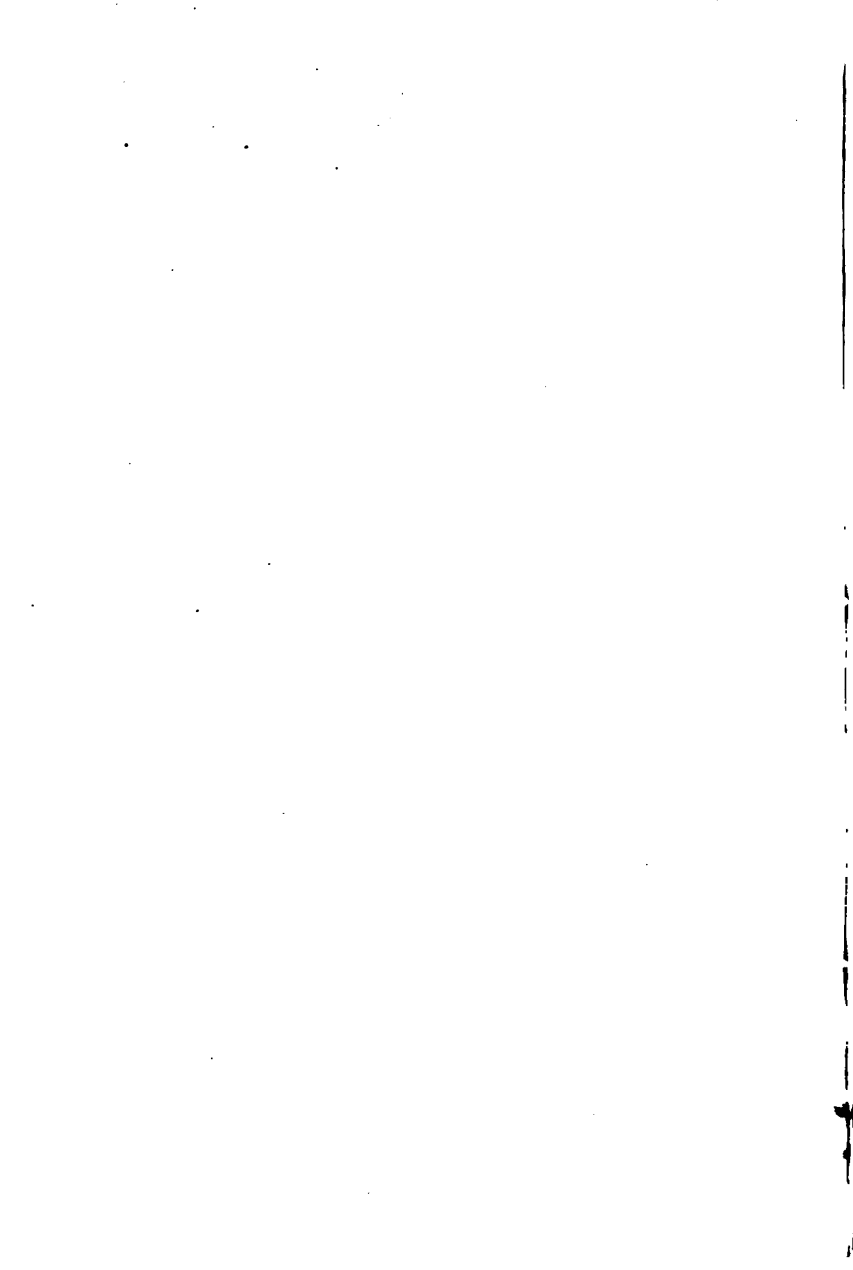
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Mr. Carstone's prophecy was but half realised. At the end of six months Herbert Bly's discretion and devotion were duly rewarded by Cherry's hand. But Tappington did *not* give her away. That saintly prodigal passed his period of probation with exemplary rectitude, but, either from a dread of old temptation, or

some unexplained reason, he preferred to remain at Portland, and his fastidious nest on Telegraph Hill knew him no more. The key of the little door on the side street passed, naturally, into the keeping of Mrs. Bly.

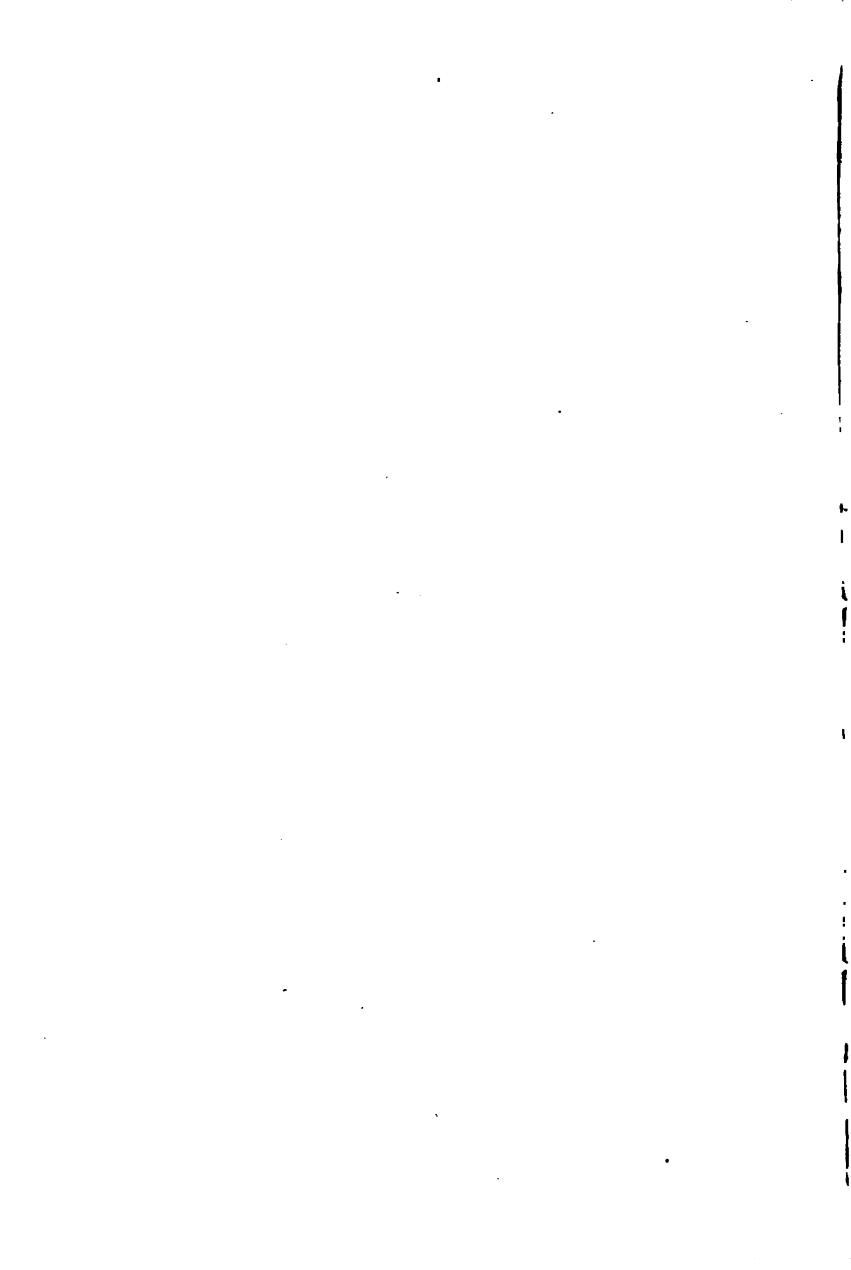
Whether the secret of Tappington's double life was ever revealed to the two women is not known to the chronicler. Mrs. Bly is reported to have said that the climate of Oregon was more suited to her brother's delicate constitution than the damp fogs of San Francisco, and that his tastes were always opposed to the mere frivolity of metropolitan society. The only possible reason for supposing that the mother may have become cognisant of her son's youthful errors was in the occasional visits to the house of the handsome George Dornton, who, in the social

revolution that followed the brief reign of the Vigilance Committee, characteristically returned as a dashing stockbroker, and the fact that Mrs. Brooks seemed to have discarded her ascetic shawl for ever. But as all this was contemporaneous with the absurd rumour that owing to the loneliness induced by the marriage of her daughter she contemplated a similar change in her own condition, it is deemed unworthy the serious consideration of this veracious chronicle.



IV

CAPTAIN JIM'S FRIEND



CAPTAIN JIM'S FRIEND

I

HARDLY one of us, I think, really believed in the auriferous probabilities of Eureka Gulch, Following a little stream, we had one day drifted into it, very much as we imagined the river gold might have done in remoter ages, with the difference that *we* remained there, while the river gold to all appearances had not. At first it was tacitly agreed to ignore this fact, and we made the most of the charming locality, with its rare watercourse that lost itself in tangled depths of manzanita and alder,

its laurel-choked pass, its flower-strewn hillside, and its summit crested with rocking pines.

‘You see,’ said the optimistic Rowley, ‘water’s the main thing after all; if we happen to strike river gold, thar’s the stream for washing it; if we happen to drop into quartz—and that thar rock looks mighty likely—thar ain’t a more natural-born site for a mill than that right bank, with water enough to run fifty stamps. That hillside is an original dump for your tailings, and a ready found inclined road for your trucks, fresh from the hands of Providence, and that road we’re kalkilatin’ to build to the turnpike will run just easy along that ridge.’

Later, when we were forced to accept the fact that finding gold was really the primary object

of a goldmining company, we still remained there, excusing our youthful laziness and incertitude by brilliant and effective sarcasms upon the unremunerative attractions of the gulch. Nevertheless, when Captain Jim, returning one day from the nearest settlement and post-office, twenty miles away, burst upon us with 'Well, the hull thing 'll be settled now, boys; Lacy Bassett is coming down yer to look round,' we felt considerably relieved.

And yet, perhaps, we had as little reason for it as we had for remaining there. There was no warrant for any belief in the special divining power of the unknown Lacy Bassett, except Captain Jim's extravagant faith in his general superiority, and even that had always been a source of amused scepticism to the camp. We

were already impatiently familiar with the opinions of this unseen oracle; he was always impending in Captain Jim's speech as a fragrant memory or an unquestioned authority. When Captain Jim began, 'Ez Lacy was one day tellin' me,' or, 'Ez Lacy Bassett allows,' or more formally, when strangers were present, 'Ez a partickler friend o' mine, Lacy Bassett—maybe ez you know him—sez,' the youthful and lighter members of the Eureka Mining Company glanced at each other in furtive enjoyment. Nevertheless no one looked more eagerly forward to the arrival of this apocryphal sage than these indolent sceptics. It was at least an excitement; they were equally ready to accept his condemnation of the locality or his justification of their original selection.

He came. He was received by the Eureka Mining Company lying on their backs on the grassy site of the prospective quartz mill, not far from the equally hypothetical 'slide' to the gulch. He came by the future stage road—at present a thickset jungle of scrub oaks and ferns. He was accompanied by Captain Jim, who had gone to meet him on the trail, and for a few moments all critical inspection of himself was withheld by the extraordinary effect he seemed to have upon the faculties of his introducer.

Anything like the absolute prepossession of Captain Jim by this stranger we had never imagined. He approached us running a little ahead of his guest, and now and then returning assuringly to his side with the expression

of a devoted Newfoundland dog, which in fluffiness he generally resembled. And now, even after the introduction was over, when he made a point of standing aside in an affectation of carelessness, with his hands in his pockets, the simulation was so apparent, and his consciousness and absorption in his friend so obvious, that it was a relief to us to recall him into the conversation.

As to our own first impressions of the stranger, they were probably correct. We all disliked him; we thought him conceited, self-opinionated, selfish, and untrustworthy. But later, reflecting that this was possibly the result of Captain Jim's over praise, and finding none of these qualities as yet offensively opposed to our own selfishness and conceit.

we were induced, like many others, to forget our first impressions. We could easily correct him if he attempted to impose upon *us*, as he evidently had upon Captain Jim. Believing, after the fashion of most humanity, that there was something about *us* particularly awe-inspiring and edifying to vice or weakness of any kind, we good-humouredly yielded to the cheap fascination of this showy, self-saturated, overdressed, and underbred stranger. Even the epithet of 'blower' as applied to him by Rowley had its mitigations; in that Trajan community a bully was not necessarily a coward, nor florid demonstration always a weakness.

His condemnation of the gulch was sweeping, original, and striking. He laughed to scorn our half-hearted theory of a gold deposit in the bed

and bars of our favourite stream. We were not to look for auriferous alluvium in the bed of any present existing stream, but in the 'cement' or dried-up bed of the original prehistoric rivers that formerly ran parallel with the present bed, and which—he demonstrated with the stem of Pickney's pipe in the red dust—could be found by sinking shafts at right angles with the stream. The theory was to us, at that time, novel and attractive. It was true that the scientific explanation, although full and gratuitous, sounded vague and incoherent. It was true that the geological terms were not always correct, and their pronunciation defective, but we accepted such extraordinary discoveries as 'ignus fatuus rock,' 'splendiferous drift,' 'mica twist' (recalling a popular species of tobacco), 'iron pirates,'

and 'discomposed quartz' as part of what he not inaptly called a 'tautological formation,' and were happy. Nor was our contentment marred by the fact that the well-known scientific authority with whom the stranger had been intimate—to the point of 'sleeping together' during a survey—and whom he described as a bent old man with spectacles, must have aged considerably since one of our party saw him three years before as a keen young fellow of twenty-five. Inaccuracies like those were only the carelessness of genius. 'That's my opinion, gentlemen,' he concluded, negligently rising, and with pointed preoccupation whipping the dust of Eureka Gulch from his clothes with his handkerchief, 'but of course it ain't nothin' to me.'

Captain Jim, who had followed every word with deep and trustful absorption, here repeated, 'It ain't nothing to him, boys,' with a confidential implication of the gratuitous blessing we had received, and then added, with loyal encouragement to him, 'It ain't nothing to you, Lacy, in course,' and laid his hand on his shoulder with infinite tenderness.

We, however, endeavoured to make it something to Mr. Lacy Bassett. He was spontaneously offered a share in the company and a part of Captain Jim's tent. He accepted both after a few deprecating and muttered asides to Captain Jim, which the latter afterwards explained to us was the giving up of several other important enterprises for our sake. When he finally strolled away with Rowley

to look over the gulch, Captain Jim reluctantly tore himself away from him only for the pleasure of reiterating his praise to us as if in strictest confidence and as an entirely novel proceeding.

'You see, boys, I didn't like to say it afore *him*, we bein' old friends—but between us, that young feller ez worth thousands to the camp. Mebbe,' he continued with grave naïveté, 'I ain't said much about him afore, mebbe, bein' old friends and accustomed to him—you know how it is, boys,—I haven't appreciated him as much ez I ought, and ez you do. In fact, I don't ezakly remember how I kem to ask him down yer. It came to mes uddent, one day only a week ago Friday night, thar under that buckeye; I was thinkin' o' one of his sayin's,

and sez I—thar's Lacy, if he was here he'd set the hull thing right. It was the ghost of a chance my findin' him free, but I did. And there *he* is, and yer *we* are settled! Ye noticed how he just knocked the bottom outer our plans to work. Ye noticed that quick sort o' sneerin' smile o' his, didn't ye—that's Lacy! I've seen him knock over a heap o' things without sayin' anythin'—with jist that smile.'

It occurred to us that we might have some difficulty in utilising this smile in our present affairs, and that we should have probably preferred something more assuring, but Captain Jim's faith was contagious.

'What is he, anyway?' asked Joe Walker lazily.

'Eh!' echoed Captain Jim in astonishment.

'What is Lacy Bassett?'

'Yes, what is he?' repeated Walker.

'Wot *is*—he?'

'Yes.'

'I've knowed him now goin' as four year,' said Captain Jim with slow reflective contentment. 'Let's see. It was in the fall o' '54 I first met him, and he's allus been the same ez you see him now.'

'But what is his business or profession? What does he do?'

Captain Jim looked reproachfully at his questioner.

'Do?' he repeated, turning to the rest of us as if disdaining a direct reply. 'Do?—why, wot he's doin' now. He's allus the same, allus, Lacy Bassett.'

Howbeit, we went to work the next day

under the superintendence of the stranger with youthful and enthusiastic energy, and began the sinking of a shaft at once. To do Captain Jim's friend justice, for the first few weeks he did not shirk a fair share of the actual labour, replacing his objectionable and unsuitable finery with a suit of serviceable working clothes got together by general contribution of the camp, and assuring us of a fact we afterwards had cause to remember, that 'he brought nothing but himself into Eureka Gulch.' It may be added that he certainly had not brought money there, as Captain Jim advanced the small amounts necessary for his purchases in the distant settlement, and for the still smaller sums he lost at cards, which he played with characteristic self-sufficiency.

Meantime the work in the shaft progressed slowly but regularly. Even when the novelty had worn off and the excitement of anticipation grew fainter, I am afraid that we clung to this new form of occupation as an apology for remaining there. For the fascinations of our vagabond and unconventional life were more potent than we dreamed of. We were slowly fettered by our very freedom; there was a strange spell in this very boundlessness of our licence that kept us from even the desire of change; in the wild and lawless arms of Nature herself we found an embrace as clinging, as hopeless and restraining, as the civilisation from which we had fled. We were quite content after a few hours' work in the shaft to lie on our backs on the hillside staring at the

unwinking sky, or to wander with a gun through the virgin forest in search of game scarcely less vagabond than ourselves. We indulged in the most extravagant and dreamy speculations of the fortune we should eventually discover in the shaft and believed that we were practical. We broke our 'salaratus bread' with appetites unimpaired by restlessness or anxiety; we went to sleep under the grave and sedate stars with a serene consciousness of having fairly earned our rest; we awoke the next morning with unabated trustfulness, and a sweet obliviousness of even the hypothetical fortunes we had perhaps won or lost at cards overnight. We paid no heed to the fact that our little capital was slowly sinking with the shaft, and that the rainy season—wherein not only 'no

man could work,' but even such play as ours was impossible—was momentarily impending.

In the midst of this, one day Lacy Bassett suddenly emerged from the shaft before his 'shift' of labour was over with every sign of disgust and rage in his face and inarticulate with apparent passion. In vain we gathered round him in concern; in vain Captain Jim regarded him with almost feminine sympathy, as he flung away his pick and dashed his hat to the ground.

'What's up, Lacy, old pard? What's gone o' you?' said Captain Jim tenderly.

'Look!' gasped Lacy at last, when every eye was on him, holding up a small fragment of rock before us and the next moment grinding it under his heel in rage. 'Look! To think that

I've been fooled agin by this blanked fossiliferous trap—blank it! To think that after me and Professor Parker was once caught jist in this way up on the Stanislaus at the bottom of a hundred-foot shaft by this rotten trap—that yer I am—bluffed again!

There was a dead silence; we looked at each other blankly.

'But, Bassett,' said Walker, picking up a part of the fragment, 'we've been finding this kind of stuff for the last two weeks.'

'But how?' returned Lacy, turning upon him almost fiercely. 'Did ye find it superposed on quartz, or did you find it *not* superposed on quartz? Did you find it in volcanic drift, or did ye find it in old red sandstone or coarse illuvion? Tell me that, and then ye kin talk.'

But this yer blank fossiliferous trap, instead o' being superposed on top, is superposed on the bottom. And that means——'

'What?' we all asked eagerly.

'Why—blank it all—that this yer convulsion of nature, this prehistoric volcanic earthquake, instead of acting laterally and chuckin' the stream to one side, has been revolutionary and turned the old river-bed bottom-side up, and yer d——d cement hez got half the globe atop of it! Ye might strike it from China, but nowhere else.'

We continued to look at one another; the elder members with darkening faces, the younger with a strong inclination to laugh. Captain Jim, who had been concerned only in his friend's emotion, and who was hanging with

undisguised satisfaction on these final convincing proofs of his superior geological knowledge, murmured approvingly and confidently, 'He's right, boys! Thar ain't another man livin' ez could give you the law and gospil like that! Ye can tie to what he says. That's Lacy all over.'

Two weeks passed. We had gathered, damp and disconsolate, in the only available shelter of the camp. For the long summer had ended unexpectedly to us; we had one day found ourselves caught like the improvident insect of the child's fable with gauzy and unseasonable wings wet and bedraggled in the first rains, homeless and hopeless. The scientific Lacy, who lately spent most of his time as a bar-room oracle in the settlement, was away, and from our dripping

canvas we could see Captain Jim returning from a visit to him, slowly plodding along the trail towards us.

'It's no use, boys,' said Rowley, summarising the result of our conference, 'we must speak out to him, and if nobody else cares to do it I will. I don't know why we should be more mealy-mouthed than they are at the settlement. They don't hesitate to call Bassett a dead-beat, whatever Captain Jim says to the contrary.'

The unfortunate Captain Jim had halted irresolutely before the gloomy faces in the shelter. Whether he felt instinctively some fore-warning of what was coming I cannot say. There was a certain dog-like consciousness in his eye and a half-backward glance over his shoulder as if he were not quite certain that Lacy was

not following. The rain had somewhat subdued his characteristic fluffiness, and he cowered with a kind of sleek storm-beaten despondency over the smoking fire of green wood before our tent.

Nevertheless, Rowley opened upon him with a directness and decision that astonished us. He pointed out briefly that Lacy Bassett had been known to us only through Captain Jim's introduction. That he had been originally invited there on Captain Jim's own account, and that his later connection with the company had been wholly the result of Captain Jim's statements. That, far from being any aid or assistance to them, Bassett had beguiled them by apocryphal knowledge and sham scientific theories into an expensive and gigantic piece of folly. That, in addition to this, they had just discovered that he

had also been using the credit of the company for his own individual expenses at the settlement while they were working on his d——d fool shaft—all of which had brought them to the verge of bankruptcy. That, as a result, they were forced now to demand his resignation—not only on their general account, but for Captain Jim's sake—believing firmly, as they did, that he had been as grossly deceived in his friendship for Lacy Bassett as *they* were in their business relations with him.

Instead of being mollified by this, Captain Jim, to our greater astonishment, suddenly turned upon the speaker, bristling with his old canine suggestion.

'There! I said so! Go on! I'd have sworn to it afore you opened your lips. I

knowed it the day you sneaked around and wanted to know wot his business was! I said to myself, Cap, look out for that sneakin' hound Rowley, he's no friend o' Lacy's. And the day Lacy so far demeaned himself as to give ye that splendid explanation o' things, I watched ye; ye didn't think it, but I watched ye. Ye can't fool me! I saw ye lookin' at Walker there, and I said to myself, Wot's the use, Lacy, wot's the use o' your slingin' them words to such as *them*? Wot do *they* know? It's just their pure jealousy and ignorance. Ef you'd come down yer, and lazed around with us and fallen into our common ways, you'd ha' been ez good a man ez the next.

But no, it ain't your style, Lacy, you're accustomed to high-toned men like Professor Parker, and you can't help showin' it. No

wonder you took to avoidin' us; no wonder I've had to foller ye over the Burnt Wood Crossin' time and again, to get to see ye. I see it all now, ye can't stand the kempany I brought ye to! Ye had to wipe the slum gullion of Eureka Gulch off your hands, Lacy——' he stopped, gasped for breath, and then lifted his voice more savagely, 'and now, what's this? Wot's this hogwash? this yer lyin' slander about his gettin' things on the kempany's credit? Eh, speak up some of ye!'

We were so utterly shocked and stupefied at the degradation of this sudden and unexpected outburst from a man usually so honourable, gentle, self-sacrificing, and forgiving, that we forgot the cause of it and could only stare at each other. What was this cheap stranger with

his shallow swindling tricks, to the ignoble change he had worked upon the man before us. Rowley and Walker, both fearless fighters and quick to resent an insult, only averted their saddened faces and turned aside without a word.

‘Ye dussen’t say it! Well, hark to me then,’ he continued with white and feverish lips. ‘*I* put him up to helpin’ himself. *I* told him to use the kempany’s name for credit. Ye kin put that down to *me*. And when ye talk of *his* resigning, I want ye to understand that *I* resign outer this rotten kempany and *take him with me!* Ef all the gold yer lookin’ for was piled up in that shaft, from its bottom in hell to its top in the gulch, it ain’t enough to keep me here away from him! Ye kin take all my share—all *my* rights yer above ground and below it—all I

carry,'— he threw his buckskin purse and revolver on the ground—'and pay yourselves what you reckon you've lost through *him*. But you and me is quits from to-day.'

He strode away before a restraining voice or hand could reach him. His dripping figure seemed to melt into the rain beneath the thickening shadows of the pines, and the next moment he was gone. From that day forward Eureka Gulch knew him no more. And the camp itself somehow melted away during the rainy season, even as he had done.

II

THREE years had passed. The pioneer stage coach was sweeping down the long descent to the pastoral valley of Gilead, and I was looking towards the village with some pardonable interest and anxiety. For I carried in my pocket my letters of promotion from the box seat of the coach—where I had performed the functions of treasure messenger for the Excelsior Express Company—to the resident agency of that company in the bucolic hamlet before me. The few dusty right-angled streets, with their rigid and staringly new shops and dwellings, the stern

formality of one or two obelisk-like meeting-house spires, the illimitable outlying plains of wheat and wild oats beyond, with their monotony scarcely broken by skeleton stockades, corrals, and barrack-looking farm buildings, were all certainly unlike the unkempt freedom of the mountain fastnesses in which I had lately lived and moved. Yuba Bill, the driver, whose usual expression of humorous discontent deepened into scorn as he gathered up his reins as if to charge the village and recklessly sweep it from his path, indicated a huge, rambling, obtrusively glazed, and capital-lettered building with a contemptuous flick of his whip as we passed. 'Ef you're kalkilatin' we'll get our partin' drink there you're mistaken. That's wot they call a *temperance house*—wot means a place where the licker ye

get underhand is only a trifle worse than the hash ye get above board. I suppose it's part o' one o' the mysteries o' Providence that wharever you find a dusty hole like this—that's naturally *thirsty*—ye run agin a "temperance" house. But never *you* mind! I shouldn't wonder if thar was a demijohn o' whisky in the closet of your back office, kept thar by the feller you're relievin'—who was a white man and knew the ropes.'

A few minutes later, when my brief installation was over, we *did* find the demijohn in the place indicated. As Yuba Bill wiped his mouth with the back of his heavy buckskin glove, he turned to me not unkindly. 'I don't like to set ye agin Gil-e-ad, which is a Scrip-too-rural place, and a God-fearin' place, and a nice dry place,

and a place ez I've heard tell whar they grow beans and pertatoes and garden sass; but afore three weeks is over, old pard, you'll be howlin' to get back on that box seat with me, whar you uster sit, and be ready to take your chances agin, like a little man, to get drilled through with buckshot from road agents. You hear me! I'll give you three weeks, sonny, just three weeks, to get your butes full o' hayseed and straws in yer har; and I'll find ye wadin' the North Fork at high water to get out o' this.' He shook my hand with grim tenderness, removing his glove—a rare favour—to give me the pressure of his large, soft, protecting palm, and strode away. The next moment he was shaking the white dust of Gilead from his scornful chariot wheels.

In the hope of familiarising myself with the local interests of the community, I took up a copy of the *Gilead Guardian* which lay on my desk, forgetting for the moment the usual custom of the country press to displace local news for long editorials on foreign subjects and national politics. I found, to my disappointment, that the *Guardian* exhibited more than the usual dearth of domestic intelligence, although it was singularly oracular on 'The State of Europe,' and 'Jeffersonian Democracy.' A certain cheap assurance, a copy-book dogmatism, a colloquial familiarity, even in the impersonal plural, and a series of inaccuracies and blunders here and there, struck some old chord in my memory. I was mutely wondering where and when I had become personally familiar with rhetoric like that,

when the door of the office opened and a man entered. I was surprised to recognise Captain Jim.

I had not seen him since he had indignantly left us, three years before, in Eureka Gulch. The circumstances of his defection were certainly not conducive to any voluntary renewal of friendship on either side; and although, even as a former member of the Eureka Mining Company, I was not conscious of retaining any sense of injury, yet the whole occurrence flashed back upon me with awkward distinctness. To my relief, however, he greeted me with his old cordiality; to my amusement he added to it a suggestion of the large forgiveness of conscious rectitude and amiable toleration. I thought, however, I detected, as he glanced at the paper which was

still in my hand and then back again at my face, the same uneasy canine resemblance I remembered of old. He had changed but little in appearance; perhaps he was a trifle stouter, more mature, and slower in his movements. If I may return to my canine illustration, his grayer, dustier, and more wiry *ensemble* gave me the impression that certain pastoral and agricultural conditions had varied his type, and he looked more like a shepherd's dog in whose brown eyes there was an abiding consciousness of the care of straying sheep, and possibly of one black one in particular.

He had, he told me, abandoned mining and taken up farming on a rather large scale. He had prospered. He had other interests at stake, 'A flour mill with some improvements—and—

and—' here his eyes wandered to the *Guardian* again, and he asked me somewhat abruptly what 'I thought of the paper.' Something impelled me to restrain my previous fuller criticism, and I contented myself by saying briefly that I thought it rather ambitious for the locality 'That's the word,' he said with a look of gratified relief, "'ambitious'"—you've just hit it. And what's the matter with that? Ye can't expect a high-toned man to write down to the level of every karpin' hound, ken ye now? That's what he says to me——' He stopped half confused, and then added abruptly: 'That's one o' my investments.'

'Why, Captain Jim, I never suspected that you——'

'Oh, I don't *write* it,' he interrupted hastily.

'I only furnish the money and the advertising, and run it gin'rally, you know. And I'm responsible for it. And I select the eddyter—and'—he continued, with a return of the same uneasy wistful look—'thar's suthin' in thet, ye know, eh?'

I was beginning to be perplexed. The memory evoked by the style of the editorial writing and the presence of Captain Jim was assuming a suspicious relationship to each other. 'And who's your editor?' I asked.

'Oh, he's — he's — er — Lacy Bassett,' he replied, blinking his eyes with a hopeless assumption of carelessness. 'Let's see! Oh yes! You knowed Lacy down there at Eureka. I disremembered it till now. Yes, sir!' he repeated suddenly and almost rudely, as if to

preclude any adverse criticism, 'he's the eddyter!'

To my surprise he was quite white and tremulous with nervousness. I was very sorry for him, and as I really cared very little for the half-forgotten escapade of his friend except so far as it seemed to render *him* sensitive, I shook his hand again heartily and began to talk of our old life in the gulch—avoiding as far as possible any allusion to Lacy Bassett. His face brightened; his old simple cordiality and trustfulness returned, but unfortunately with it his old disposition to refer to Bassett. 'Yes, they waz high old times, and ez I waz sayin' to Lacy on'y yesterday there is a kind o' freedom 'bout that sort o' life that runs civilisation and noospapers mighty hard, however high toned they is. Not

but what Lacy ain't right,' he added quickly, 'when he sez that the opposition the *Guardian* gets here comes from ignorant low-down fellers ez wos brought up in played-out camps, and can't tell a gentleman and a scholar and a scientific man when they sees him. No! So I sez to Lacy, "Never you mind, it's high time they did, and they've got to do it and to swaller the *Guardian*, if I sink double the money I've already put into the paper."'

I was not long in discovering from other sources that the *Guardian* was not popular with the more intelligent readers of Gilead, and that Captain Jim's extravagant estimate of his friend was by no means endorsed by the community generally. But criticism took a humorous turn even in that practical settlement, and it appeared

that Lacy Bassett's vanity, assumption, and ignorance were an unfailing and weekly joy to the critical in spite of the vague distrust they induced in the more homely witted, and the dull acquiescence of that minority who accepted the paper for its respectable exterior and advertisements. I was somewhat grieved, however, to find that Captain Jim shared equally with his friend in this general verdict of incompetency, and that some of the most outrageous blunders were put down to *him*. But I was not prepared to believe that Lacy had directly or by innuendo helped the public to this opinion.

Whether through accident or design on his part, Lacy Bassett did not personally obtrude himself upon my remembrance until a month later. One dazzling afternoon, when the dust

and heat had driven the pride of Gilead's manhood into the surreptitious shadows of the temperance hotel's back room, and had even cleared the express office of its loungers, and left me alone with darkened windows in the private office, the outer door opened and Captain Jim's friend entered as part of that garish glitter I had shut out. To do the scamp strict justice, however, he was somewhat subdued in his dress and manner, and possibly through some gentle chastening of epigram and revolver since I had seen him last, was less aggressive and exaggerated. I had the impression, from certain odours wafted through the apartment and a peculiar physical exaltation that was inconsistent with his evident moral hesitancy, that he had prepared himself for the interview by a pre-

vious visit to the hidden fountains of the temperance hotel.

'We don't seem to have run agin each other since you've been here,' he said with an assurance that was nevertheless a trifle forced, 'but I reckon we're both busy men, and there's a heap too much loafing goin' on in Gilead. Captain Jim told me he met you the day you arrived; said you just cottoned to the *Guardian* at once, and thought it a deal too good for Gilead. Eh? Oh, well, jest ez likely he *didn't* say it—it was only his gassin'. He's a queer man—is Captain Jim.'

I replied somewhat sharply that I considered him a very honest man, a very simple man, and a very loyal man.

'That's all very well,' said Bassett, twirling

his cane, with a patronising smile; 'but, as his friend, don't you find him considerable of a darned fool?'

I could not help retorting that I thought *he* had found that hardly an objection.

'*You* think so,' he said querulously, apparently ignoring everything but the practical fact—'and maybe others do, but that's where you're mistaken. It don't pay. It may pay *him* to be runnin' me as his particular friend, to be quotin' me here and there, to be gettin' credit of knowin' me and my friends and ownin' me—by Gosh! but I don't see where the benefit to *me* comes in. Eh? Take your own case down there at Eureka Gulch, didn't he send for me just to show me up to you fellers? Did I want to have anything to do with the Eureka Company?

Didn't he set me up to give my opinion about that shaft just to show off what I knew about science and all that? And what did he get me to join the company for? Was it for you? No! Was it for me? No! It was just to keep me there for *himself*, and kinder pit me agin you fellers and crow over you! Now that ain't my style! It may be *his*—it may be honest and simple, and loyal as you say, and it may be all right for him to get me to run up accounts at the settlement and then throw off on me—but it ain't my style. I suppose he let on that I did that. No? He didn't? Well then, why did he want to run me off with him, and cut the whole concern in an underhand way and make me leave with nary a character behind me, eh? Now, I

never said anything about this before—did I? It ain't like me. I wouldn't have said anything about it now, only you talked about *my* being benefited by his darned foolishness. Much I've made out *him*.'

Despicable, false, and disloyal as this was,—perhaps it was the crowning meanness of such confidences that his very weakness seemed only a reflection of Captain Jim's own, and appeared in some strange way to degrade his friend as much as himself. The simplicity of his vanity and selfishness was only equalled by the simplicity of Captain Jim's admiration of it. It was a part of my youthful inexperience of humanity that I was not above the common fallacy of believing that a man is 'known by the company he keeps,' and that he is in a

manner responsible for its weakness; it was a part of that humanity that I felt no surprise in being more amused than shocked by this revelation. It seemed a good joke on Captain Jim!

'Of course *you* kin laugh at his darned foolishness — but, by Gosh, it ain't a laughing matter to me.'

'But surely he's given you a good position on the *Guardian*,' I urged. 'That was disinterested, certainly.'

'Was it? I call that the cheekiest thing yet. When he found he couldn't make enough of me in private life, he totes me out in public as *his* editor. The man who runs *his* paper! And has his name in print as the proprietor, the only chance he'd ever get of being before

the public. And don't know the whole town is laughing at him !'

'That may be because they think *he* writes some of the articles,' I suggested.

Again the insinuation glanced harmlessly from his vanity. 'That couldn't be, because *I* do all the work, and it ain't his style,' he said with naïve discontent. 'And it's always the highest style, done to please him, though between you and me it's sorter castin' pearls before swine—this 'Frisco editing—and the public would be just as satisfied with anything I could rattle off that was peart and sassy. Something spicy or personal. I'm willing to climb down and do it—for there's nothin' stuck up about me, you know, but that darned fool Captain Jim has got the big head about

the style of the paper, and darned if I don't think he's afraid if there's a lettin' down, people may think it's him! Ez if! Why, you know as well as me, that there's a sort of snap *I* could give these things that would show it was me and no slouch did them, in a minute.'

I had my doubts about the elegance or playfulness of Mr. Bassett's trifling, but from some paragraphs that appeared in the next issue of the *Guardian* I judged that he had won over Captain Jim—if indeed that gentleman's alleged objections were not entirely the outcome of Bassett's fancy. The social paragraphs themselves were clumsy and vulgar. A dull-witted account of a select party at Parson Baxter's, with a point blank compliment to Polly Baxter his daughter might have made her pretty cheek

burn, but for her evident prepossession for the meretricious scamp, its writer. But even this horse-play seemed more natural than the utterly artificial editorials with their pinchbeck glitter and cheap erudition; and thus far it appeared harmless.

I grieve to say that these appearances were deceptive. One afternoon, as I was returning from a business visit to the outskirts of the village, I was amazed on re-entering the main street to find a crowd collected around the *Guardian* office gazing at the broken glass of its windows and a quantity of type scattered on the ground. But my attention was at that moment more urgently attracted by a similar group around my own office, who, however seemed more cautious, and were holding timor-

ously aloof from the entrance. As I ran rapidly towards them, a few called out, 'Look out—he's in there!' while others made way to let me pass. With the impression of fire or robbery in my mind, I entered precipitately only to find Yuba Bill calmly leaning back in an armchair with his feet on the back of another, a glass of whisky from my demijohn in one hand and a huge cigar in his mouth. Across his lap lay a stumpy shot gun which I at once recognised as 'the Left Bower,' whose usual place was at his feet on the box during his journeys. He looked cool and collected, although there were one or two splashes of printers' ink on his shirt and trousers, and from the appearance of my lavatory and towel he had evidently been removing similar stains from his hands. Putting his gun

aside and grasping my hand warmly without rising, he began with even more than his usual lazy imperturbability.

‘Well, how’s Gilead lookin’ to-day?’

It struck me as looking rather disturbed, but, as I was still too bewildered to reply, he continued lazily—

‘Ez you didn’t hunt me up, I allowed you might hev got kinder petrified and dried up down yer, and I reckoned to run down and rattle round a bit and make things lively for ye. I’ve jist cleared out a newspaper office over thar. They call it the *Guardi-an*, though it didn’t seem to offer much pertection to them fellers ez was in it. In fact, it wasn’t ez much a fight ez it orter hev been. It was rather monotonous for me.’

'But what's the row, Bill? What has happened?' I asked excitedly.

'Nothin' to speak of, I tell ye,' replied Yuba Bill reflectively. 'I jest meandered into that shop over there, and I sez, "I want ter see the man ez runs this yer mill o' literatoor an' progress." Thar waz two infants sittin' on high chairs havin' some innocent little game o' pickin' pieces o' lead outer pill boxes like, and as soon ez they seed me, one of 'em crawled under his desk and the other scooted outer the back door. Bimeby the door opens again, and a fluffy coyotelookin' feller comes in and allows that *he* is responsible for that yer paper. When I saw the kind of animal he was, and that he hadn't any weppings, I jist laid the Left Bower down on the floor. Then I sez, "You allowed

in your paper that I oughter hev a little sevility knocked inter me, and I'm here to hev it done. You ken begin it now." With that I reached for him, and we waltzed oncet or twicet around the room, and then I put him up on the mantelpiece and on them desks and little boxes, and took him down again, and kinder wiped the floor with him gin'rally, until the first thing I knowed he was outside the winder on the side walk. On'y blamed if I didn't forget to open the winder. Ef it hadn't been for that, it would hev been all quiet and peaceful-like and nobody hev knowed it. But the sash being in the way it sorter created a disturbance and unpleasantness *outside*.'

'But what was it all about?' I repeated.
'What had he done to you?'

'Ye'll find it in that paper,' he said, indicating a copy of the *Guardian* that lay on my table with a lazy nod of his head. 'P'raps you don't read it? No more do I. But Joe Bilson sez to me yesterday: "Bill," sez he, "they're goin' for ye in the *Guardian*." "Wot's that?" sez I. "Hark to this," sez he, and reads out that bit that you'll find there.' I had opened the paper, and he pointed to a paragraph. 'There it is. Pooty, ain't it?' I read with amazement as follows:—

'If the Pioneer Stage Company want to keep up with the times, and not degenerate into the old style "one hoss" road-waggon business, they'd better make some reform on the line. They might begin by shipping off some of the old-time whisky-guzzling drivers who are too high and mighty to do anything but handle the ribbons, and are above speaking to a passenger unless he's a favourite or one of their set. Over praise for an

occasional scrimmage with road agents, and flattery from Eastern greenhorns, have given them the big head. If the fool-killer were let loose on the line with a big club, and knocked a little civility into their heads, it wouldn't be a bad thing, and would be a particular relief to the passengers for Gilead who have to take the stage from Simpson's Bar.'

'That's my stage,' said Yuba Bill quietly, when I had ended, 'and that's *me*.'

'But it's impossible,' I said eagerly. 'That insult was never written by Captain Jim.'

'Captain Jim,' repeated Yuba Bill reflectively. 'Captain Jim; yes, that was the name o' the man I was playin' with. Shortish hairy feller, suthin' between a big coyote and the old style hair-trunk. Fought pretty well for a hay-footed man from Gil-e-ad.'

'But you've whipped the wrong man, Bill,' I said. 'Think again! Have you had any

quarrel lately? Run against any newspaper man?' The recollection had flashed upon me that Lacy Bassett had lately returned from a visit to Stockton.

Yuba Bill regarded his boots on the other arm-chair for a few moments in profound meditation. 'There was a sort o' gaudy insect,' he began presently, 'suthin' half way betwixt a hoss-fly and a devil's darnin'-needle ez crawled up onter the box seat with me last week, and buzzed! Now I think on it, he talked high faluten' o' the infloence of the press and sech. I may hev said "Shoo" to him when he was hummin' the loudest. I mout hev flicked him off oncet or twicet with my whip. It must be him. Gosh!' he said suddenly, rising and lifting his heavy hand to his forehead, 'now I think

agin, *he was the feller ez crawled under the desk when the fight was goin' on, and stayed there.* Yes, sir, that was *him*. His face looked sorter familiar, but I didn't know him moultin' with his feathers off.' He turned upon me with the first expression of trouble and anxiety I had ever seen him wear. 'Yes, sir, that's him. And I've kem—me, Yuba Bill!—kem *myself*, a matter of twenty miles, totin' a *gun*—a gun, by Gosh!—to fight that—that—that potatar-bug!' He walked to the window, turned, walked back again, finished his whisky with a single gulp, and laid his hand almost despondingly on my shoulder. 'Look ye old—old fell, you and me's ole friends. Don't give me away. Don't let on a word o' this to any one! Say I kem down yer howlin' drunk on a gen'ral tear! Say I mistook that news-

paper office for a cigar-shop, and—got licked by the boss! Say anythin' you like, 'cept that I took a gun down yer to chase a fly that had settled onter me. Keep the Left Bower in yer back office till I send for it. Ef you've got a back door somewhere handy where I can slip outer this without bein' seen I'd be thankful.'

As this desponding suggestion appeared to me as the wisest thing for him to do in the then threatening state of affairs outside—which, had he suspected it, he would have stayed to face—I quickly opened a door into a courtyard that communicated through an alley with a side street. Here we shook hands and parted; his last dejected ejaculation being, 'That potato-bug!' Later I ascertained that Captain Jim had retired to his ranch some four miles distant.

He was not seriously hurt, but looked, to use the words of my informant, 'ez ef he'd been hugged by a playful b'ar.' As the *Guardian* made its appearance the next week without the slightest allusion to the fracas, I did not deem it necessary to divulge the real facts. When I called to inquire about Captain Jim's condition, he himself, however, volunteered an explanation.

'I don't mind tellin' you, ez an old friend o' mine and Lacy's, that the secret of that there attack on me and the *Guardian* was perlitikal. Yes, sir! There was a powerful organisation in the interest o' Halkins for Assemblyman ez didn't like our high-toned editorials on caucus corruption, and hired a bully to kem down here and suppress us. Why, this yer Lacy spotted the idea to oncet; yer know how keen he is.'

'Was Lacy present?' I asked as carelessly as I could.

Captain Jim glanced his eyes over his shoulder quite in his old furtive canine fashion, and then blinked them at me rapidly. 'He war! And if it warn't fur *his* pluck and *his* science and *his* strength I don't know whar *I'd* hev been now! Howsomever, it's all right. I've had a fair offer to sell the *Guardian* over at Simpson's Bar, and it's time I quit throwin' away the work of a man like Lacy Bassett upon it. And between you and me, I've got an idea and suthin' better to put his talens into.'

III

It was not long before it became evident that the 'talens' of Mr. Lacy Bassett, as indicated by Captain Jim, were to grasp at a seat in the State Legislature. An editorial in the *Simpson's Bar Clarion* boldly advocated his pretensions. At first it was believed that the article emanated from the gifted pen of Lacy himself, but the style was so unmistakably that of Colonel Starbottle, an eminent political 'war-horse' of the district, that a graver truth was at once suggested, namely that the *Guardian* had simply been transferred to Simpson's Bar, and merged

into the *Clarion* solely on this condition. At least it was recognised that it was the hand of Captain Jim which guided the editorial fingers of the colonel, and Captain Jim's money that distended the pockets of that gallant political leader.

Howbeit Lacy Bassett was never elected; in fact he was only for one brief moment a candidate. It was related that upon his first ascending the platform at Simpson's Bar a voice in the audience said lazily, 'Come down!' That voice was Yuba Bill's. A slight confusion ensued, in which Yuba Bill whispered a few words in the colonel's ear. After a moment's hesitation the 'war-horse' came forward, and in his loftiest manner regretted that the candidate had withdrawn. The next issue of the *Clarion*

proclaimed with no uncertain sound that a base conspiracy gotten up by the former proprietor of the *Guardian* to undermine the prestige of the Great Express Company had been ruthlessly exposed, and the candidate on learning it *himself* for the first time withdrew his name from the canvass as became a high-toned gentleman. Public opinion, ignoring Lacy Bassett completely, unhesitatingly denounced Captain Jim.

During this period I had paid little heed to Lacy Bassett's social movements, or the successes which would naturally attend such a character with the susceptible sex. I had heard that he was engaged to Polly Baxter, but that they had quarrelled in consequence of his flirtations with others, especially a Mrs. Sweeny, a profusely ornamented but reputationless widow. Captain

Jim had often alluded with a certain respectful pride and delicacy to Polly's ardent appreciation of his friend, and had more than half hinted with the same reverential mystery to their matrimonial union later, and his intention of 'doing the square thing' for the young couple. But it was presently noticed that these allusions became less frequent during Lacy's amorous aberrations, and an occasional depression and unusual reticence marked Captain Jim's manner when the subject was discussed in his presence. He seemed to endeavour to make up for his friend's defection by a kind of personal homage to Polly, and not unfrequently accompanied her to church or to singing-class. I have a vivid recollection of meeting him one afternoon crossing the fields with her, and looking into

her face with that same wistful, absorbed, and uneasy canine expression that I had hitherto supposed he had reserved for Lacy alone. I do not know whether Polly was averse to the speechless devotion of these yearning brown eyes;—her manner was animated and the pretty cheek that was nearest me mantled as I passed,—but I was struck for the first time with the idea that Captain Jim loved her! I was surprised to have that fancy corroborated in the remark of another wayfarer whom I met, to the effect, 'That now that Bassett was out o' the running it looked ez if Captain Jim was makin' up for time!' Was it possible that Captain Jim had always loved her? I did not at first know whether to be pained or pleased for his sake. But I concluded that whether the un-

worthy Bassett had at last found a *rival* in Captain Jim or in the girl herself, it was a displacement that was for Captain Jim's welfare. But as I was about leaving Gilead for a month's transfer to the San Francisco office, I had no opportunity to learn more from the confidences of Captain Jim.

I was ascending the principal staircase of my San Francisco hotel one rainy afternoon, when I was pointedly recalled to Gilead by the passing glitter of Mrs. Sweeny's jewellery and the sudden vanishing behind her of a gentleman who seemed to be accompanying her. A few moments after I had entered my room I heard a tap at my door, and opened it upon Lacy Bassett. I thought he looked a little confused and agitated. Nevertheless with an assumption of cordiality

and ease he said, 'It appears we're neighbours. That's my room next to yours.' He pointed to the next room, which I then remembered was a sitting-room *en suite* with my own, and communicating with it by a second door, which was always locked. It had not been occupied since my tenancy. As I suppose my face did not show any extravagant delight at the news of his contiguity, he added hastily 'There's a transom over the door, and I thought I'd tell you you kin hear everything from the one room to the other.'

I thanked him, and told him drily that, as I had no secrets to divulge and none that I cared to hear, it made no difference to me. As this seemed to increase his confusion and he still hesitated before

the door, I asked him if Captain Jim was with him.

'No,' he said quickly. 'I haven't seen him for a month, and don't want to. Look here, I want to talk to you a bit about him.' He walked into the room, and closed the door behind him. 'I want to tell you that me and Captain Jim is played! All this runnin' o' me and interferin' with me is played! I'm tired of it. You kin tell him so from me.'

'Then you have quarrelled?'

'Yes. As much as any man can quarrel with a darned fool who can't take a hint.'

'One moment. Have you quarrelled about Polly Baxter?'

'Yes,' he answered querulously. 'Of course I have. What does he mean by interfering?'

'Now listen to me, Mr. Bassett,' I interrupted. 'I have no desire to concern myself in your association with Captain Jim, but since you persist in dragging me into it, you must allow me to speak plainly. From all that I can ascertain you have no serious intentions of marrying Polly Baxter. You have come here from Gilead to follow Mrs. Sweeny, whom I saw you with a moment ago. Now, why do you not frankly give up Miss Baxter to Captain Jim, who will make her a good husband and go your own way with Mrs. Sweeny? If you really wish to break off your connection with Captain Jim, that's the only way to do it.'

His face, which had exhibited the weakest and most pitiable consciousness at the mention of

Mrs. Sweeny, changed to an expression of absolute stupefaction as I concluded.

‘Wot stuff are you tryin’ to fool me with?’ he said at last roughly.

‘I mean,’ I replied sharply, ‘that this double game of yours is disgraceful. Your association with Mrs. Sweeny demands the withdrawal of any claim you have upon Miss Baxter at once. If you have no respect for Captain Jim’s friendship, you must at least show common decency to her.’

He burst into a half-relieved half-hysterical laugh. ‘Are you crazy,’ gasped he. ‘Why, Captain Jim’s just huntin’ *me* down to make *me* marry Polly. That’s just what the row’s about. That’s just what he’s interferin’ for—just to carry out his darned fool ideas o’ gettin’ a wife for

me; just his vanity to say *he's* made the match. It's *me* that he wants to marry to that Baxter girl—not himself. He's too cursed selfish for that.'

I suppose I was not different from ordinary humanity, for in my unexpected discomfiture I despised Captain Jim quite as much as I did the man before me. Reiterating my remark that I had no desire to mix myself further in their quarrels, I got rid of him with as little ceremony as possible. But a few minutes later, when the farcical side of the situation struck me, my irritation was somewhat mollified, without however increasing my respect for either of the actors. The whole affair had assumed a triviality that was simply amusing, nothing more, and I even looked forward to a meeting

with Captain Jim and *his* exposition of the matter—which I knew would follow—with pleasurable anticipation. But I was mistaken.

One afternoon, when I was watching the slanting volleys of rain driven by a strong south-wester against the windows of the hotel reading-room, I was struck by the erratic movements of a dripping figure outside that seemed to be hesitating over the entrance to the hotel. At times furtively penetrating the porch as far as the vestibule, and again shyly recoiling from it, its manner was so strongly suggestive of some timid animal that I found myself suddenly reminded of Captain Jim and the memorable evening of his exodus from Eureka Gulch. As the figure chanced to glance up to the window where I stood I saw to my astonishment that

it *was* Captain Jim himself, but so changed and haggard that I scarcely knew him. I instantly ran out into the hall and vestibule, but when I reached the porch he had disappeared. Either he had seen me and wished to avoid me, or he had encountered the object of his quest, which I at once concluded must be Lacy Bassett. I was so much impressed and worried by his appearance and manner that, in this belief, I overcame my aversion to meeting Bassett, and even sought him through the public rooms and lobbies in the hope of finding Captain Jim with him. But in vain—possibly he had succeeded in escaping his relentless friend.

As the wind and rain increased at nightfall, and grew into a tempestuous night, with deserted streets and swollen waterways, I did not go out

again, but retired early, inexplicably haunted by the changed and brooding face of Captain Jim. Even in my dreams he pursued me in his favourite likeness of a wistful, anxious, and uneasy hound, who, on my turning to caress him familiarly, snapped at me viciously, and appeared to have suddenly developed a snarling rabid fury. I seemed to be awakened at last by the sound of his voice. For an instant I believed the delusion a part of my dream. But I was mistaken; I was lying broad awake, and the voice clearly had come from the next room, and was distinctly audible over the transom.

‘I’ve had enough of it,’ he said, ‘and I’m givin’ ye now — this night — yer last chance. Quit this hotel and that woman, and go back to

Gilead and marry Polly. Don't do it and I'll kill ye, ez sure ez you sit there gapin' in that chair. If I can't get ye to fight me like a man,—and I'll spit in yer face or put some insult onto you afore that woman, afore everybody, ez would make a bigger skunk nor you turn,—I'll hunt ye down and kill ye in your tracks.'

There was a querulous murmur of interruption in Lacy's voice, but whether of defiance or appeal I could not distinguish. Captain Jim's voice again rose, dogged and distinct.

'Ef *you* kill me it's all the same, and I don't say that I won't thank ye. This yer world is too crowded for yer and me, Lacy Bassett. I've believed in ye, trusted in ye, lied for ye, and fought for ye. From the time I took ye up—a

feller-passenger to 'Fresco—believin' there wor the makin's of a man in ye, to now, you fooled me—fooled me afore the Eureka boys; fooled me afore Gilead; fooled me afore *her*; fooled me afore God! It's got to end here. Ye've got to take the curse of that foolishness off o' me! You've got to do one single thing that's like the man I took ye for, or you've got to die. Times waz when I'd have wished it for your account—that's gone, Lacy Bassett! You've got to do it for *me*. You've got to do it so I don't see "d——d fool" writ in the eyes of every man ez looks at me.'

He had apparently risen and walked towards the door. His voice sounded from another part of the room.

'I'll give ye till to-morrow mornin' to do suthin' to lift this curse off o' me. Ef you refoose, then, by the living God, I'll slap yer face in the dinin'-room, or in the office afore them all! You hear me!'

There was a pause and then a quick sharp explosion that seemed to fill and expand both rooms until the windows were almost lifted from their casements, a hysterical inarticulate cry from Lacy, the violent opening of a door, hurried voices, and the tramping of many feet in the passage. I sprang out of bed, partly dressed myself, and ran into the hall. But by that time I found a crowd of guests and servants around the next door, some grasping Bassett, who was white and trembling, and others kneeling by Captain Jim, who

was half lying in the doorway against the wall.

'He heard it all,' Bassett, gasped hysterically pointing to me. '*He* knows that this man wanted to kill me.'

Before I could reply, Captain Jim partly raised himself with a convulsive effort. Wiping away the blood that, oozing from his lips, already showed the desperate character of his internal wound, he said in a husky and hurried voice: 'It's all right, boys! It's my fault. It was *me* who done it. I went for him in a mean underhanded way jest now, when he hadn't a weppin' nor any show to defend himself. We gripped. He got a holt o' my derringer—you see that's *my* pistol there—I swear it, and turned it agin me in self-defence, and sarved me right. I

swear to God, gentlemen, it's so!' Catching sight of my face, he looked at me, I fancied half imploringly and half triumphantly, and added, 'I might hev knowed it! I allers allowed Lacy Bassett was game!—game, gentlemen—and he was. If it's my last word, I say it—he was game!'

And with this devoted falsehood upon his lips and something of the old canine instinct in his failing heart, as his head sank back he seemed to turn it towards Bassett, as if to stretch himself out at his feet. Then the light failed from his yearning upward glance, and the curse of foolishness was lifted from him for ever. So conclusive were the facts that the coroner's jury did not deem it necessary to detain Mr. Bassett for a single moment after the inquest.

But he returned to Gilead, married Polly Baxter, and, probably on the strength of having killed his man,' was unopposed on the platform next year, and triumphantly elected to the Legislature!

THE END



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